



Man Through the Ages

Victoria Ukolova

# The Last of the Romans and European Culture



Progress Publishers

*Cornelia Deane*

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# The Last of the Romans and European Culture

**Translated from the Russian  
by Vic Schneierson**



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Виктория Уколова  
«ПОСЛЕДНИЕ РИМЛЯНЕ» И ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА

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## A FEW WORDS IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

At the height of the Middle Ages, Pierre de Blois, certainly not the greatest of medieval poets, said we were like dwarfs who had climbed the shoulders of giants, and that if we saw farther than our predecessors, we owed it to those giants.

This shows Europeans of those days were aware of the indissoluble connection between generations, linking the past to the present and, therefore, to the future.

Though it is often said the Middle Ages had no sense of time, there is no denying that people in those days were acutely aware of the march of history. True, they conceived history differently, and looked in it for something else than we do — not for the specific features of a period, not for the realities of past days, but for the eternal values cherished by people of all generations moulding them into a single family.

What moulded the history of Europe was Christianity and, indeed, the heritage of Antiquity — the latter being the root and stem upon which were grafted the shoots of all the national cultures of Europe. But in the Middle Ages the culture of Antiquity was not perceived as single and whole. It was seen above all as something created by specific people, by eminent authorities.

We are told the Renaissance was a revival of Antiquity, which had been consigned to oblivion in the Middle Ages. Certainly, the antique heritage played an immense role in

the Renaissance culture. But how could that heritage have been revived if it had been completely forgotten, or perhaps even destroyed (as some maintain), in the Middle Ages?

It is true that people in the Middle Ages knew far less of Antiquity than the Renaissance humanists. It is true that many achievements of the antique culture had been lost, often irretrievably, during the great upheavals — the fall of the antique civilisation, and the birth of the medieval world. It is true that the new peoples aspiring to top roles in European history, and that the new, most powerful, social institution, the Christian church, which was dreaming of world supremacy, brought with them a new vision of the world, a new system of values and ideas, and a new artistic language. It is also true that the human personality changed type, and the spiritual climate changed as well. But fertile soil was needed for all these novel elements to grow. And that soil could not be virgin or wild soil. It had to be a soil turned up by the plough of civilisation, a cultured soil. And for the Middle Ages it was the soil consisting of whatever had survived from the antique culture.

Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Ovid, Ptolemy, and Hippocrates penetrated, and installed themselves in the intellectual and poetic world of the Middle Ages. But this was possible only because the cultural treasures of Antiquity had good keepers who salvaged and safeguarded them in those hard times when Europe was going through one of its most significant turning points as it embarked on feudalism. These keepers were the Last of the Romans, to whom posterity owes the deepest respect and the deepest gratitude.

They had been different, those Last of the Romans — statesmen, rhetoricians, philosophers, poets, historians, and simply men of wide knowledge. There were those among them who in social standing already belonged to the clergy (in the 6th and 7th centuries, when the church had begun to dominate the intellectual sphere). But they were all akin, because their bid to safeguard cultural tra-

ditions had consciously or not paved the way for the future of Europe.

Europe lay in ruins as it turned into the Middle Ages. The barbarian kingdoms were dissociated. Culture was eroded. Yet by the end of the Middle Ages, a European cultural community had begun to take shape. The peoples of Europe were on the road to progress, their advance stimulated to no small degree by the antique cultural heritage.

This book is about the continuity of time, the cultural continuity of civilisations, the ideological struggle that generated the growth of the medieval culture, the confrontation and interaction of Christianity and paganism, of the Roman and the barbarian worlds. More important than that, this book is about the Last of the Romans, those whose fame down the ages had not really been prodigious, but who had by their tireless labours linked the successive generations and succeeded in resisting barbarity.

## **THE ETERNAL CITY, CHRISTIANS AND BARBARIANS**

In A.D. 305 Emperor Diocletian, then at the height of his fame and power, abdicated and retired to his native Dalmatia, leaving his puzzled contemporaries and descendants no clue as to the reasons.

He left a vast empire stretching from Britain to the Libyan desert, and from the western ocean to the Euphrates. He left it in a state of prosperity and peace, with a militarily precise system of administration and taxation, a rigid hierarchy, and a well-trained, unquestioningly obedient army.

Following the brutal persecution of Christians, it had seemed that his subjects had recovered their respect for the ancient gods, the great patrons of Rome which, despite his choosing Nicomedia as his capital, was still the sacred capital of the empire, the "genetrix of men and the genetrix of immortals".<sup>1</sup>

The Roman provinces girdled the Mediterranean, and encompassed the richest countries of three continents — Europe, Asia, and Africa. For all their diversity, they were a single political, cultural and historical entity that had assimilated the exquisite Hellenistic culture and that constantly interacted with, or was in counterposition to, the cultures of other peoples.

This Greco-Roman-Oriental synthesis gave birth to, and promoted the rapid spread of Christianity.

The heart of the Roman world was the Mediterra-

nean with its ancient civilisation that had for many centuries thrived upon the slave system. Rome's political universalism, its ideological syncretism and relative religious tolerance, had for a long time cemented the cultural unity of that enormous region.

The period that followed Diocletian's abdication showed the illusory nature of the prosperity reached under his rule. The road chosen by Mediterranean Europe at the dawn of its history, had led to a dead end. Society and the state were in crisis. The once flowering cities were sinking into ruin. The countryside, which had gone over to a system of requisitions in kind, was incapable of feeding the vast administrative machinery, the troops, and the urban populations. Reforms and the spread of the colonate failed to halt the economic decline, the cutbacks in production, the impoverishment of the people. Disaffection spread across the length and breadth of the empire. Rioting occurred, growing at times into nothing short of insurrections.

A cruel struggle for power persisted almost without let-up. Diocletian, who had instituted a system of four rulers to ease the problems of administration, had thereby made the soil fertile for separatist tendencies. The severance of East from West that had begun in his time, was building up rapidly. True, it seemed on the point of stopping under Constantine the Great and Theodosius I. But there was a final severance after A.D. 395, pitting the West European against the Byzantine medievalism.

While the eastern part of the empire solidified under the rule of a Byzantine emperor, the western shrank slowly but surely under the onslaught of barbarians who kept rolling across its territory in endless waves. The country's unprotected heart was exposed to the invaders' sword. In 410, the Eternal City was seized by Alaric, the Gothic king, and again in 455 by King Genseric and his Vandals. In the 470s, Apollinaris Sydonius, the bishop of Clermont, complained with typically Roman arrogance that he was forced to live among uncouth hordes and endure the guttural sound of Germanic speech. Yet less than fifty years later, the former Western Roman Empire had

turned from an Italo-Gaulish-Hispanic-Roman into a Germano-Latin world.

The urban civilisation of the Romans was replaced by a rural communal civilisation of incipiently feudal farming, a seignorial political organisation, a new system of ideas, and new spiritual and aesthetic values.

The period from the 4th to the 7th centuries was a time of radical flux, and the Western Mediterranean was one of its pivotal centres. The times denuded the critical state of the antique ideology and culture, of the pagan religions, the pagan philosophy and world outlook. The antique world was no match for the tragically aggravated problems of being, knowledge, and human relations. In the setting of universal crisis and barbarity, the habitual doctrines gave way to Christianity. Christianity became the common theory of the burgeoning medieval world, and at once its encyclopaedic compendium, its popular logic, its spiritual inspiration and source of enthusiasm, consolation, and salvation.

In the 4th and 5th centuries religious issues occupied people's minds much more than philosophy. Christianity grew from an idea that captivated masses of people into an official religion, an influential political and social power. The church included in the sphere of its interests and concerns all aspects of life—from the economic arrangements to the salvation of human souls.

The emperors Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan in 313, ending more than three centuries of persecution and granting Christians the right to worship freely and openly. But though Christianity appeared to have triumphed, its victory failed to yield the desired peace either to the state or the people or the church itself, which was facing the prospect of schism. While Irenaeus, the 2nd-century Christian apologist, had listed just twenty-two heresies, the Domestic Medicine Chest of Epiphanius of Salamis, in A.D. 375, suggested remedies for 156. An ideological rift was brewing between East and West, aggravated by their severance and the increasing isolation of the Western provinces.

In the circumstances, elaboration of a definitive

dogma was no longer the business of pure theology and had important philosophical and political overtones.

Debates over the Trinity concept, the determinative dogma of Christian theology, became central to the ideological conflict of the 4th century, with far-reaching consequences not only for theology and philosophy, but also for the church in general. Six years after the Edict of Milan, Arius (256-336), presbyter of the Alexandrian Church, a man of unflagging zeal and tenacity, cast doubt on the rationality of the Trinitarian doctrine that God was consubstantial in three Persons: the Father, the Son (Christ, the Logos incarnate), and the Holy Spirit. He argued that not all the persons of the Trinity were equal, for God the Father had preceded the Son, who was thus not consubstantial (*homoousios*) to the first person of the Trinity, but begotten by that person and consequently not of the same substance (*homoiousios*). The issue would seem abstract on the face of it. But the controversy over the one letter that distinguished the above two Greek coinages, entailed such palpable consequences that hierarchs and imperial ministers had had to intervene, and repeatedly so. A multitude of people became involved, especially in Egypt and the eastern provinces.

Gregory of Nyssa, a contemporary, complained that everywhere people talked of nothing but incomprehensible things. They crowded the streets, the market places, the town squares, and the road intersections. Instead of telling you the price of a thing, they argued about the begotten and unbegotten. Instead of telling you the price of bread, they declared the Father greater than the Son. Matters reached the point of violence and street brawls.

Arius' bitterest adversary was Athanasius (295-373), the bishop of Alexandria, of whom his contemporaries said he made war against the whole world. Abounding in zealous activity and countless ups and downs, the life of Athanasius (deposed as bishop of Alexandria five times, spending a total of seventeen years in exile, being reinstated and clinging to his creed) was typical of those stormy times. For successive decades, he was one of the most conspicuous figures in the religious controversy in the East,



and, indeed, influenced the growth of the monastic movement in the West through the Latin version of his *Life of St. Antony*, in which he set forth the ideals and rules of monasticism.

Arius was not the first to question the Trinitarian dogma. An attempt to rationalise it was made in the 2nd century by an opponent of Tertullian by name of Praxeas who held that God the Father became incarnate and suffered (*patripassianism*), the Son being only a modality of the same person. In the 3rd century, too, there were those who maintained that God was "concealed" in three hypostases, etc. But Arius' doctrine evoked especially great fury because in his time it was most important for the church to maintain its unity, and because the mutinous presbyter of Alexandria had risen against the "holy of holies", the original and complete, divinity of its mystic founder.

The idea that the Son had been begotten and was no more than an intermediary between the Creator and the Creation, was liable to entail far-reaching conclusions as to his lower and subordinate position in relation to God the Father. Consequently, it could also arouse doubts about the divine origin of the church and the dogmata of the orthodox religion.

Emperor Constantine intervened. He worked for a compromise. This failing, he called the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325, which adopted the Symbol of Faith and resolutely condemned the teaching of Arius, though without mentioning names. The Nicaean formula of the Trinitarian dogma did not settle the controversy. It proved half-baked, because it allowed for the interpretation that the two first persons of the Trinity were consubstantial.

Out of the more than 300 participants in the council only seven were from Western bishoprics. The fight against Arianism, in fact, had little relevance for the West at that time. Not until the end of the 5th century, during the barbarian incursions and the emergence of barbarian kingdoms in the territory of the empire, did that issue squarely face the Roman church. In the 4th century, it

was more disturbed by the spread of Donatism in Northern Africa, merging with the movements of the Circumcellions and Agonists, which gave an outlet to the social protest of the people. The Donatists, who opposed the union of church and state and called for evangelical purity of the clergy, were at that time a bigger threat to the centralistic aspirations of the church. So that St. Augustine, the leading character on the Catholic scene of that time, devoted much effort to rooting out that heresy. But echoes of Donatism did not die until the 7th century, when it was mentioned by Isidore of Seville, prelate, scholar and enlightener of Visigothic Spain.

Following condemnation by the Nicaean council, the obstinate Arian bishops and priests were banished to Illyria, where barbarian tribes were on the move at that time.

The first Christian teacher of the Goths, a people that conspicuously contributed to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, was the Arian bishop Ulphilas, who translated the Bible into Gothic. The missionary activity of the banished Arians converted many barbarian tribes to the heretic version of Christianity, which only added to the complexities of those days.

The fight between Arianism and orthodoxy abounded in dramatic episodes. Both sides were disinclined to follow the evangelical behests of non-resistance, and continuously excommunicated each other to the accompaniment of maledictive imprecations. At the numerous ecumenical councils, Arianism was successively deposed and returned to favour. This occurred because, in effect, the Christian majority did not rigidly follow either of the two currents. Political aims of the day, here-and-now and more distant advantages, combinations of social and political forces, the psychological fickleness of the crowd, and other factors, gave the edge to now one now the other of the sides.

It was not until the ecumenical council of 381, at which no Western prelates were present, that Arianism was crushingly defeated. In substance, however, the Christological controversies of the 5th century were an aftermath

of the Arian crisis, which was not, indeed, conclusively settled throughout the further history of the church.

The religious conflicts of the 4th century were, among other things, related to organisational matters. With the hierarchic structure of the church solidifying and the body of canon law taking final shape, the correlation of the Roman and Constantinopolitan cathedras grew into a problem of major proportions. Though several ecumenical councils formally reasserted the primacy of Rome, the Eastern and Western churches gravitated increasingly towards severance and independence. At the ecumenical council in Serdica in 353 the Western cathedra separated from the Eastern for the first time.

The ecumenical council of 381 failed to put an end to the controversies, because confirmation of the substantive identity of the Second Person of the Trinity and the First gave rise to a multitude of new theological problems: how did God the Father and God the Son unite in a single substance, how did the divine and mortal natures combine in the person of Christ, in what way were divine reason and will conjugated in Him, and so on. Soon after that council, Bishop Apollinaris of Laodicea denied the existence of human nature in Christ, maintaining that Christ was a single and divine person. His idea was elaborated upon by the Monophysites, who raised Christ's divine nature to an absolute, and the Monothelites, who considered the Logos an incarnation of the divine will.

The opposite point of view was formulated by Nestorius, presbyter of Antioch, who laid stress on the human nature of Christ and who aggravated his departure from orthodoxy by saying the Virgin Mary could not truly be called Mother of God, as she was only the mother of the man Christ. Objections were not slow in coming from Eutyches, prior of a monastery near Constantinople, who had in his overwhelming wish to uphold the verity as he himself saw it, gone to the other extreme and committed a heresy close to that of Apollinaris.

The Christological controversies were aggravated by those over the Virgin Mary, which were not consummat-

ed until the mid-20th century, when the dogma of Mary's ascension was officially endorsed.

The religious controversies of the 5th century were no less bitter than the Arian conflict. They involved the bishop of Constantinople, John the Chrysostom (the Golden-mouthed), Theophilus and Cyril, bishops of Alexandria, and many other prelates. They spread, indeed, to the imperial court, the lay authorities, and a considerable segment of the people. Gripped by a polemical fever, the arguers went to extremes in their interpretations of the dogmata, and were in the end nearly all accused of heresy.

The Western church kept aloof from the Christological debates. It tried to pacify the hostile camps, though taking advantage of the raging debates to buttress Rome's authority and prestige in matters of the faith.

In 448, Leo I, bishop of Rome, addressed a letter to the patriarch of Constantinople in which he set forth the orthodox view that in Christ the properties of each of his subsistences and his substance were fully preserved and united to create one person. But his move fell through. The Council of Ephesus in 449, which came to be known as the Robber Synod owing to its scandalous proceedings, refused to reckon with the opinion of the primate of Rome and did not bother to read his message. The council vindicated Eutyches, chief of the Monophysites, but the latter's triumph was shortlived. Two years later, at the Council of Chalcedon, the ideas of Leo I on the hypostatic union were reaffirmed. Christ was recognised as the only begotten, one in two natures, without mixture, change, division or dissociation.

But Leo's theological victory was a dubious one. The Council of Chalcedon had, in effect, confirmed the division of the churches: the Constantinopolitan cathedra was declared supreme in relation to all the eastern ones, and, indeed, equivalent to the cathedra of Rome. It was obvious that the rift between the eastern and western churches could not be overcome. On the contrary, it was tending to become still wider. It was, in fact, an unfathomable abyss.

From Chalcedon the road led to a schism. More, the Christological discussions were fraught with schism also within the eastern church, with the result that the entire non-Greek East was engulfed in heresy.

The Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries should not be reduced exclusively to their theological content. Though clad in religious garb, they reflected the problems and aspirations of the people, who were eager to stabilise their life, to find deliverance from their troubles, or at least to mitigate their sad plight. In a sense, the controversies clarified the "human problem", the predestination and possibilities of man, and the aims and limits of human activity, thinking and feeling, at a time when mankind was going through a most trying change.

This linkage was evident in the opposition of Pelagius, a British monk and theologian who founded a school in Rome at the end of the 4th century. The gifted preacher won popularity in the Eternal City practically overnight, especially among educated patricians, in whom Christianity mingled with inbred respect for the classical tradition. The thrust of Pelagius' sermons was that all the good and all the evil for which people merited praise or censure, was committed, not born with us. People, he maintained, did not have fully developed spiritual powers at birth; they were born with an ability for both good and evil. At birth, they had neither virtues nor vices nor sins. Before their own will began to function, they had nothing aside from what God had endowed them with. Pelagius championed free will and the significance of every man's option. The burden of the original sin, he said, did not weigh upon people as it had upon Adam. Consequently, people were able to pick their own way in life.

The fight against Pelagianism went on for more than thirty years. A special part was played by Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who was aware of the dangers that the British monk's doctrine held for the church. By negating man's sinfulness, Pelagius tended to destroy people's sense of guilt, and to weaken their bond with the church, be-

cause the need for redemption and salvation dropped away.

The history of Augustine's fight against Pelagianism is interesting from yet another angle. Like other church fathers of that era, Augustine had never been a mere theologian or theorist. He was also a highly active politician, skilled in using all the influence that ideology exercised on politics and society. His vigorous theorising and energetic criticism set the teaching of Pelagius up for the final and accurately aimed blow delivered by the state in 418. Augustine inspired one of the first in the long list of precedents whereby the church, utilising theoretical differences, prompted the state to make short work of dissenters. In Augustine's hands, the metaphysical doctrine proved a most effective and deadly weapon. The controversy over free will and God's grace was settled conclusively in favour of the latter, because otherwise Christ's redemptive sacrifice and the salvationist role of the church would lose meaning.

In 431, Pelagianism was condemned at the ecumenical council in Ephesus. But the controversy concerning free will, predestination, and God's grace, has continued in the Christian world to this day.

The western church was Latinised in the 4th century. Its forms of worship differed from those of the eastern church. Prayer books and other divine writings were translated into Latin. The clerical community consolidated itself. The powers of the bishop of Rome grew firmer, determined by the prestige of the Eternal City and the tradition that considered the Roman cathedra the apostolic throne. The Roman church developed in a setting of economic decline, of extreme political instability, and of social dissociation, constantly threatened by devastating barbarian incursions.

Given the kaleidoscopic succession of emperors, and the endless strife within the ruling aristocracy, the church, in substance, became the only tangible ideological and, indeed, political power that tried to hold down the centrifugal tendencies eroding Roman society. For the church

had become a centralised and rigidly regulated hierarchic organisation. Small wonder that economic matters, monastic and episcopal estates, the regulation of urban affairs and municipal government, the problems of war and peace, and political matters, disturbed the western bishops and priests no less than did the struggles against heresies or the moral instruction of their flock.

Furthermore, western Christianity, which reposed on Roman traditions and was essentially rational and pragmatic, did not gravitate towards theological theorising as much as eastern Christianity. This is clearly evident from the activity of the eastern and western fathers of the church and the character of the theological synthesis in East and West.

The apologists and fathers of the church elaborated upon and introduced a system of religious dogmata and of organisational principles. In the patristic period (4th-7th centuries in the West) there emerged the fundamentals of the Christian outlook of subsequent ages. The works of such church fathers as Ambrose of Mediolan, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and Gregory the Great became canonical in the medieval West, and were commented upon and subjected to diverse interpretations, along with the Bible.

Despite the keen religious struggle in which the Christian God vanquished the Olympian gods, Roman society was, save for the clergy itself, far less involved in the theological disputes than society in the East, where Trinitarian and Christological debates seemed vital and urgent, and troubled everyone from monarch to commoner.

The western aristocracy retired into its shell of caste arrogance. The plebs frenziedly demanded bread and public spectacles. The emperors were occupied fighting for power, and feared for their lives. Officials barely coped with the snowballing economic, financial, and social problems, and, wherever possible, were glad to let the bishops settle them. Colonists and smallholders strained to stay afloat, to grow their meagre crop on the sickly soil, constantly imperilled by robbers and barbarians, while the big landowners, protected by armed detachments (as



the feudal lords would be one day) stripped them of much more than the surpluses. Hunger and epidemic diseases became commonplace in recently prosperous Italy.

All this instability and the mounting pressure of the barbarian tribes along the borders of the empire bred fear and apathy. Exaltation and religious enthusiasm of diverse hues went along with debauch and refined vice, spiritualistic search along with gross material ambition, greed, egoism, and complete ignorance. The imperial court and the senatorial aristocracy wallowed up to their necks in intrigue, betrayal, and treason. The "glorious people of Rome", too, had in substance ceased to exist, having turned into an unorganised crowd speaking a babble of languages that cared very little for the past greatness of Rome.

This was hardly surprising, for the population of the Eternal City and the Western provinces had long since become an ethnic mixture. The West was overrun by people from the East and by barbarians who had brought along their own religions, their own vision of the world, and their own way of life. Small wonder that even back in the 2nd century, the sarcastic Juvenal had said that the Orontes, a river in Syria, had become a tributary of the Tiber.

In this carousal of fear and debauch, people tried to find an escape—some by galvanising ancient and alien pagan cults, and others in ascetic worship of Christ. Yet in the West, Christianity was still not a mass religion in the 4th century. Some adopted it because it was in vogue, or for careerist reasons, and renounced it just as easily, while secretly worshipping the habitual ancient or foreign gods. The devotees of the ancient religion, the protectors of the past greatness of Rome, were still the best educated representatives of the higher Roman aristocracy.

Life in the West, if we take the sources of those days, presented two completely different pictures. In the works of pagan writers we see the eternal golden-domed Rome proud of its former glory and piety, and faithful to the ancient gods who had made it their chosen city and endowed it with the lofty mission of governing the world.

This we learn from the poets Ausonius, Claudianus, and Rutilius Namatianus. We learn this also from the letters of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a most distinguished statesman of that period. Like Cicero and Pliny the Younger, he has left behind ten books of letters depicting his time and his contemporaries. Rome, it is true, was no longer the capital. The emperors had given preference to Milan and Ravenna. But it was still the spiritual centrepiece of the Western world, the seat of the Senate.

Reading Symmachus' letters one gains the impression that life in the latter half of the 4th century was little different from the life portrayed by Pliny at the end of the 1st and beginning of the 2nd centuries. The Senate was still more troubled by personal squabbles and contradictions than by the affairs of the empire. It flattered the emperors Gratian and Theodosius, using the same expressions with the same servility as Pliny had once applied to Domitian and Trajan. The nobility and the officials were still occupied in scrambling for profitable offices that held promise of swift enrichment and tangible power. Like before, the patricians were surrounded by crowds of clients and sycophants. Symmachus observed that "it is considered the greatest honour in Rome to be surrounded by a crowd".<sup>2</sup>

Regularly and with the greatest of care, people performed pagan rituals. There were still the old colleges of augurs, vestal virgins, and other Roman priests. The nobility took pleasure in literature, rhetoric and, partly, philosophy. But it was still more engrossed in following the fashion in dress and in observing the etiquette. Symmachus complained that lay duties took up most of his time, but said it was impossible not to pay the requisite visits. In short, life appeared to follow the long since established order, and the impression was that nothing imperilled it.

People liked watching gladiators fight in the arena. They followed those who fed them and who entertained them better. Symmachus, when he was the prefect of Rome, begged the emperor for aid in running the circus and other theatrical shows. The emperor was generous.

The lusts of the crowd were satiated by horse races and performances with the participation of elephants brought to Rome from afar. Symmachus, a loving father, saw to it once that crocodiles be brought to Rome to take part in festivities honouring his son's appointment to the praetorship. Gladiators continued to die in the arenas of Rome, while the poet Prudentius pleaded that the butchery be ended, though his voice was not heard.

The letters of Symmachus and evidence left behind by members of his circle led some scholars to believe that people of those times had not felt the crucial changes amidst which they lived. True, Symmachus saw many of the vices. He had himself been compelled to defend the religion of his ancestors, and to suffer final defeat. But, still, shortly before those events he had occasion to exclaim: "We live in an age that favours virtue, when gifted people must blame themselves alone if they do not get what they deserve."<sup>3</sup> This posture was as idealistic as it was touching.

Symmachus complained of the Roman world's economic exhaustion. Plunder and pillage were widespread in the provinces. The roads were an unhealthy place. Emperors recruited slaves for their armies, owing to the shortage of free men. But for the historian this was not a grave enough thing to lead to the fall of Rome. No, the world would not survive without the Eternal City.

The evidence left by Christian writers yielded a different picture. We see in it no signs of tranquillity or prosperity. Life was strained to the extreme. Society teetered on the edge of an abyss. Christianity and only Christianity, which sought political and spiritual supremacy with frenzied energy, could prevent its downfall.

The works of Jerome and Augustine, the church fathers, abounded in fervent exposures of vice. False beliefs, moral degradation, universal corruption, and debauch — this was the far from complete list of sins that doomed society to extinction. Christians never let up their attacks on the pagans. They were annoyed that Rome, which they wished to see at the head of the Christian world, was still predominantly pagan. Still, the positions of the Christians

were growing stronger. People were ever more benignly disposed towards Christian preachers, notably like the eloquent and fanatical Jerome at whose feet patrician ladies lay prostrated hoping for eternal life and salvation.

Symmachus mentions the public ceremonies held in honour of the ancient gods. The corps of priests was, according to him, doing its duties faithfully. The works of Jerome, Ambrose of Mediolan, Augustine, the poet Prudentius, and other Christian writers, however, produced an idealised picture of the blissful triumph of Christianity, holding promise, in the long term, of the so ardently awaited Golden Age.

But the situation in the Christian church, too, was anything but idyllic. Not only heresy was jeopardising its unity. There was also struggle between political groups, and personal struggles for power. During the clash between Damasus and Ursinus, for example, who contended for the office of Roman primate, several hundred people lost their lives. Historian Ammianus Marcellinus reports, that 137 dead bodies were found in the Basilica of Sytininus one day, whereupon it was difficult to pacify the outraged populace. Marcellinus notes that the rivals' bid for the bishopric was prompted not by any pious wish but by a lust for profit and sensual pleasure. (Still, we may recall that Damasus, who had triumphed, ruled the Roman community with an iron hand for nearly two decades, declaring the Roman throne "apostolic", and doing what he could to subordinate the bishoprics of the Western provinces.) While, on the other hand, it was one of the Last of the Romans, Praetextatus, head of the pagan party in the Senate, who endeavoured to pacify the aroused Christians, calling on them to be peaceful, to show humility, and to practise fraternal love. Jerome reported that Praetextatus, a man of learning, disguised his reproaches over the carnal aspirations of the two claimants to the bishopric, in a jest saying that if he were consecrated bishop of Rome, he himself would immediately embrace Christianity.

Still, the church kept gaining strength and gradually became a state within a state.

But these two pictures lacked a most essential element fateful for the Western Roman Empire: the barbarians, Germans, who had been nothing more than slaves a hundred or two hundred years before, were growing into an inexorably powerful force in the 4th and 5th centuries, finally bringing about the fall of the empire.

In the 4th century, the glorious Roman army had, in substance, become an army of barbarian mercenaries. Even the military treasury was now called barbarian (*fiscus barbaricus*). Germans were made commanders. They, too, constituted the Praetorian Guard. It was their will that removed or installed puppet emperors. Roman eagles had given place to barbarian dragons on the army insignia.

Romans, who had for centuries taken pride in everything truly Roman, began to imitate barbarians even in attire. Emperor Gratian donned the costume of his Alani bodyguard, and young dandies appeared in society dressed in trousers, which had earlier been a detested attribute of barbarism. They also wore their hair long.

In the 4th century, the pressure of the barbarian tribes on the borders of the Western Roman Empire became so strong that the imperial troops were not always able to contain it. But if in 356-358 the Franks and Alemanni had been flung back, the progress of the barbarians thrusting into imperial lands became uncheckable in the early 5th century. Franks, Vandals, Alanis, and Suevians, and then also Goths, overran one imperial territory after another.

The situation was paradoxical to say the least, for barbarians were defending Rome from barbarians. At the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, the high commander of Roman troops was a Vandal by name of Stylichos, who had scored no few victories over invading barbarians. In 408, however, the Emperor Honorius, influenced by the highly anti-German court, executed Stylichos. This had a most negative effect on the empire's capacity for defence. In 410, Rome fell under the onslaught

of Alaric's Visigoths. This made the whole Western world shudder. Even Jerome, the Christian writer who condemned Rome's corruption, exclaimed in despair: "Alas, the world is crashing about our ears!"

Augustine, who lamented over the sad plight of the Eternal City, began writing his famous philosophico-religious utopia, *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*). For three days, the Visigoths looted and ravaged Rome. To be sure, they behaved much the same as the Romans had once behaved in vanquished cities. But if brutality towards barbarians was justified by their "lower" status, brutality towards Romans and the sack of the finest city in the world, evoked not only fear, hatred, despair, and grief, but also "incomprehension" by those who had over centuries been accustomed to regard Rome ruler of the world. It signalled the fall of the Eternal City, and also of the entire system of Roman values.

In the mid-5th century, Italy experienced the awesome invasion of the Huns. The territory of the Western Roman Empire shrank swiftly and inexorably. One barbarian kingdom after another sprang up on its former lands: that of the Visigoths, Vandals, Burgundians, and Franks. In 476, Odoacer, chief of the barbarian tribes, deposed the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire, a minor named Romulus-Augustus. Yet this was but a quiet epilogue. The fall of Rome was a great historical tragedy comprising the downfall of the Roman socio-economic slave system and the corresponding political, ideological, and cultural structures.

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## **FROM THE ALTAR OF VICTORY TO THE HOLY CITY**

The extinction of paganism did not occur overnight. Its decline lasted several centuries. But by the time of Emperor Julian (361—363) it had outlived itself both as a religion and as a political ideology. Julian's attempt to revive the ancient cults and thus create a single religion with its own dogmata, its own theology and a corporative priesthood, was the last outburst, a tragic but wholly understandable last fling of paganism, a splurge of the Hellenic spirit, which thereupon performed the foreign but historically necessary job of elaborating the final forms of Christianity. Then came an era in which Christian dogmata and Christian rites took relatively final shape, an era of ecumenical councils and heresies.

In the West, especially among the higher Roman nobility, which seemed to be petrified in a final pagan trance, there were many devotees of the old religion. Paganism also prevailed among the peasants, for whom Christianity was both incomprehensible and foreign, while the traditional gods were habitual and lived by their side almost as neighbours. It was the peasant environment, indeed, that remained the habitat of pagan survivals which were not completely done away with throughout the Middle Ages. Paganism, and the heresies connected with it, also had powerful support in the beliefs of the barbarians who were rapidly inundating the empire.

As an official ideology, paganism was dead. But like the spilled blood of the mythical Hyacinthus changed into the flower that bore his name, so paganism sprouted forth again and again in the people's rites, beliefs, and folklore. It was not only paganism's philosophical systems, not



only the works of antique art, but also the pagan rationalism, its sensual and joyous perception of the world, the feelings of humans who could well become gods, that revived during the Renaissance. As an embodiment of faith in the immediate humanity of all divine things, of the indivisibility of the higher and the human worlds, the antique gods gave rise to a special vision of the world and thus to a perfect art. The faith that the ideal and divine were imaginable and embodyable gave greater freedom to the human spirit and reason. This faith survived down the ages and inspired a powerful growth of ideology and culture during the Renaissance.

Greek theogony, study of the origin of the gods, adopted by Rome, was a concrete type of polytheism. The gods were a third generation who had seized power by deicide and fratricide. (This particular point was a target of special criticism by the apologists and fathers of the church.) The single element out of which the Greco-Roman gods emerged was fragmented by those very gods. Joyous and merry, Olympians bore in their breasts a great sadness and expectation of death. One and the same god appeared in different guises, with different functions, and gave the start to a new divine offspring, who, often enough, helped consign his parent to oblivion. Each god strove to extend the limits of his power, but the result was that gods began to compete not only on Mount Olympus, but also in the consciousness of men who worshipped them. In mythology, each god ascended, grew, and broke up into fragments by means of the pagan's consciousness.

Romans with their penchant for regulation, sought to appoint a patron or protector for every aspect of life. Some two dozen gods and goddesses, for example, protected the infant during just the moment of its birth. The gods of Rome were an abstraction of law and morality. They were gods not only of the natural elements, even less so, but also of the social forces. But the Roman mythology, which merged with the Greek, did not confine itself to this synthesis. Rome also accepted the gods of the peoples who were part of the empire. Alongside Jupiter, even

a little in front of him, stood the Egyptian Osiris and Isis, the Persian Mithras, and other countless gods of the East.

Cults and mysteries formed an incredible hodge-podge. And small wonder that even in the 2nd century Lucian was once driven to inquire whence the Romans had Apis and Coribantes and Sabazius? Who was this Median called Mithras, clad in Persian garb and wearing a tiara on his head? He knew not a word of Greek and did not understand when a Roman greeted him. Lucian was outraged by the Egyptian gods portrayed with dogs' heads or as a motley bull from Memphis. Yet, he added, the Romans paid them divine tribute. These gods had their own oracles and priests. Lucian considered it shameful to speak of, let alone worship, the ibises, monkeys, and goats, and thousands of other ludicrous gods the Egyptians had installed in Heaven.

When the vital powers of the Greco-Roman polytheism were sapped, philosophers tried to create a rational religion. In substance, the paganism of the Last of the Romans, Praetextatus, Symmachus and Macrobius, was close to a peculiar monotheism. For did not Julian single out as the chief cult, the worship of the supreme and single god, the Infinite Sun, which had little resemblance to the anthropomorphic Helios of the times of the Greek city-states. The pagan philosophy of Rome's last few centuries, too, looked persistently for a single god. Represented by the last of its Neoplatonic philosophers, such as Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, paganism made a final effort to join rationalism with mysticism and produce the great synthesis of the antique vision of the world.

Aspiring to the infinite that is everything and nothing, antique thought did not hesitate to rely on its old instrument, that of dialectics, on abstract logical constructions. Julian had wanted to offer the people a renewed and invigorated paganism. In fact, however, he offered them a philosophy they could not understand; it was comprehensible to but a narrow circle, and for this one reason could not serve as the spiritual cement of society.

Abstract thought that tried to express in logical form or through mystical revelations things that were extrasensual, arrived at negating the possibility of embodying worship in sensual form, the possibility of direct communication with the gods, and thereby the vital powers of Greco-Roman polytheism. The antique gods died on earth, turning into ephemeral supratemporal entities. Zeus, Aphrodite and Dionysus turned into symbols concealing abstract philosophical schemata.

By attaining supreme synthesis, paganism negated its own self. But in its rational search for the One, late antique thought failed. Logical antitheses led it to new unsolvable problems. At first, Neoplatonism had, in substance, renounced the world and all sensual forms. Later, however, it was compelled to renounce reason in favour of ecstasy — a rapturous delight within the reach of just those few who were worthy of merging with divinity. Out of a faith practised by all people, paganism turned into a religion of the elite, and was inevitably replaced by a different ideology, one that was within the reach of all, capable of satisfying, if only in an illusory way and only at some particular stage, the aspirations of the majority. This religion was Christianity, a religion that had long since begun accumulating strength in the womb of the antique society.

Paganism had one more very strong side: a cult of the emperor and cult of Rome. Those were crucially important elements which cemented the different tribes and races inhabiting the empire. Not only was Christianity unable to overcome that cult; it was compelled to absorb it, embodying it in the concept of Rome's domination over the world and of spiritual power dominating secular. This in the West. In the East it embodied the cult in a merger of imperial and church power as a single entity uniting the peoples. More, Christians borrowed from paganism the "secret of secrets" behind its tremendous psychological impact on the masses: the sensual embodiment of the divine and ideal. The seventh Ecumenical Council offers evidence of the link between iconolatry, the worship of images, and the sacrament of incarnation. Having adopt-

ed this antique principle, however, Christianity sought other means for putting it into effect, other forms of the beautiful: these were found in the mature forms of Christian art.

The onslaught of Christianity came when paganism was no longer monolithic. Among the bulk of its devotees, the habit of performing rituals had replaced true belief. The mass consciousness had long since accepted the myth and maintained a conservative social vision of the world. The paganism of the people was rather closer to indifference than conviction. This was why, having struck up an alliance with the state and having thus acquired use of methods of official compulsion in addition to ideatic forms of influence, Christianity could, without much difficulty, convert masses of pagans who had no strong convictions to its faith.

The paganism of the intelligentsia was of a different kind. It reposed on devotion to ancient philosophy rather than mere myth—a philosophy that had for many centuries sought answers to the crucial questions of being in the sphere of reason rather than faith. For these people the vision of the world recorded in biblical canon was not only profoundly foreign, but simply unacceptable, owing to reasons of a primarily intellectual nature, because for them it was a negation of knowledge as such, a renunciation of thought, that greatest of man's prerogatives. Hence the pagan search for monotheism. Hence the all-encompassing synthesis of Neoplatonism as a contraposition of true knowledge and non-knowledge, of light and dark. Hence the striving to purify morality, and the gravitation towards asceticism, which were typical of late paganism as well as Christianity.

More, for a pagan intellectual Christianity was not only non-knowledge but, strictly speaking, also non-religion, a kind of atheism, because no god could be human and no human could be god. Whereas the Christian god pretended to combine two natures in one person. Emperor Julian paid special attention to this point in his polemics against the Christians. Though at odds with

Christianity, however, Julian did not deny its "miraculous" aspect. He denied it the right to claim singularity and supremacy. This point blends philosophico-theological non-acceptance with political non-acceptance. We see a collision not only of two ideological, but also of two political doctrines. And this political collision led, in the final analysis, to the downfall of one of the adversaries.

In the East, paganism attained its peak in its latest philosophical synthesis, whereas in the West it was the Roman nobility that clung to paganism most tenaciously. Renouncing it was for them tantamount to renouncing the past glory and universal mission of Rome. In their view, the pagan cult and Roman statehood were indissoluble. By Roman tradition anyone holding high government office would simultaneously perform important religious duties, often those of priest. So in the 4th century Rome was still a centre of paganism. An abridged list of its landmarks numbered 423 temples. And the emperors had no choice but to suffer the city's pagan spirit for it was the seat of the Senate—an institution that might have lost effective authority but retained a high social standing and encompassed the survivors of the ancient Roman aristocracy.

Prefect of Rome Symmachus reported that during a visit to Rome, Emperor Constantius, that persecutor of paganism, looked upon the pagan temples "without anger" and respectfully read the names of gods on their walls.

Historian Ammianus Marcellinus recorded that in Theodosius' reign, when Christianity was officially accepted, priests of the Mother of Gods washed her statue in the Almo River.

It seems that imperial bans tended to fire the pagan zeal of the Romans. The nobility made a display of their priestly duties, and boasted of being hierophants of Hecate or priests of Hercules, Isis, Mithras or other gods. Praetextatus, Flavian, and Symmachus, who were leaders of the Senate and the pagan opposition, were moved in their paganism not only by a consuming attachment to the past glory of Rome, but also by a lust for Rome's great

future, above all political. They could not know that nothing would avert the fall of the Roman world and the eclipse of Roman glory. For them resistance to Christianity was resistance to everything un-Roman and barbarian. Rome's great legacy and glory, as they saw it, was to be passed down to posterity. Not even emperors were entitled to impinge upon it.

The fight that paganism sought to put up against Christianity was inevitable. Doubly so, because the rift ran across the souls of people and affected their families, as well as the political, governmental, and general religious spheres. In the homes of patricians, those staunch defenders of paganism, the female half did not, as a rule, support the heads of families, and gravitated towards Christianity. The following family picture drawn by Jerome, is a revealing illustration: Senator Albin, a leader of the pagan party, was playing with his little granddaughter. Seated in her grandfather's lap, the child hummed Christian psalms which her mother had taught her. The ladies of the aristocratic Roman houses considered it good form to be in spiritual opposition to their husbands and fathers. They listened with rapt attention to Christian preachers, and often corresponded with them.

After the death of Emperor Julian, the relations between the old and the new religion in the West, though fairly strained, did not lead to any sharp or extensive conflict. While the Christians held that the ancient cult merely wanted to die "spectacularly", paganism refused to surrender and employed a variety of forms of resistance. The uncertain religious peace that extended from 364 to 382 inspired hopes among pagans that their religion would retain its prestige, which had for many centuries been backed by government support. To some extent, therefore, they were caught unawares by the proclamation of Christianity as the official religion. Now they were denied their main and habitual buttress, that of alliance with the authorities.

The explosion that occurred in the relations between the old and new religions was inevitable. It was brought about partly by the defeat the Romans suffered from the

Goths at Adrianople, in which Emperor Valent laid down his life. Three years earlier (in 375) Emperor Valentinian I, who had shown religious tolerance, had died on the Danube. The Western Roman Empire went to his sons Gratian (375—383), who was frivolous and intolerant, and the minor Valentinian II (375—392). Theodosius I, who later gained the title of Great, became emperor of the East.

The names of these rulers are associated with the adoption of harsh laws against paganism. In 381, Emperor Theodosius issued an edict stripping apostates who forsook Christianity of civil rights and outlawing nocturnal sacrifices. In 382 Gratian relinquished the title of pontifex (high priest), confiscated the property of pagan priestly colleges, and denied them further governmental financial support. This was a devastating blow. Henceforth, paganism was completely and conclusively separated from the state and deprived of the moneys that had paid for the sparkle and pomp of pagan rituals.

Simultaneously, Gratian took a step far less drastic on the face of it than denial of governmental subsidies. But it aroused outrage and precipitated the final and decisive battle between pagans and Christians. He ordered the statue of the goddess Victoria to be removed from the Senate, where it had been installed by Emperor Augustus, who had in 29 B. C. brought an Altar of Victory from Tarentum to perpetuate the memory of the Battle at Actium, and placed it at the foot of the statue of Victoria. It was the pride of the Romans, a symbol of their glory and power, a token of their political and military fortunes. For more than four centuries, the wings of Victory had blessed Rome and inspired its unconquerable legions.

The altar had been removed first in A. D. 357 under Emperor Constantius II, the persecutor of paganism, but Emperor Julian had put it back in its place.

In A. D. 382, Emperor Gratian had it removed once and for all. This was a mortal insult to the Roman Senate, where pagans and those who were only nominally Christian, were in the majority. The Senate resolved to ask the emperor for the altar to be restored.



This delicate mission was entrusted to Symmachus, head of the Senate and staunch champion of paganism. He was a most distinguished man not only because he belonged to an ancient and wealthy house, not only because of the high offices he held from an early age, but also because he was one of the most educated men of his time, a brilliant orator and writer of letters that served as models for subsequent generations. He was known to be incorruptible, honest, decent, kind, noble, humane, and tactful. For this he was revered not only by fellow pagans, but also by Christians, who lamented that so virtuous a man was an adversary of theirs rather than a friend. His antagonist Ambrose, bishop of Milan, described him as "most glorious", and Ambrose was a man chary of praise.

Emperor Gratian said the altar and statue of Victoria had to be removed because they were an insult to the Christian senators. The Senate, however, refused to accept this motive. It instructed Symmachus to plead for the return of the cherished symbols. The contradiction that we may espy in these developments is rather seeming than real. The Roman nobility, most of which remained pagan in spirit, could not accept the repeal of the union of their religion with the authority of the state that was hallowed by centuries-old tradition. The fact that the pagan priesthood was being cut off from financial assistance by the state appeared as sacrilege to them, an outrage upon Roman patriotism. That was why even the Christian senators did not object when Symmachus was sent to plead with the imperial court.

The mission was nothing short of delicate. It called for the utmost diplomatic tact, restraint and patience. And it seemed doomed. Indeed Emperor Gratian refused to see Symmachus and his companions. But in the following year, Gratian was assassinated and the purple went to 12-year-old Valentinian II or, more precisely, to his mother Justinia, known to be pro-Arian. The youthful ruler, depressed and frightened by the revolts and the hunger that rolled across Italy, was probably aware of the insecurity of his throne. In any case, this was true of his power-seeking mother. The emperor, she held, could not af-

ford to go against the wishes of the pagan nobility — not as decidedly as his elder brother Gratian.

In 384, Symmachus again went to the imperial court in Milan, and was received and heard. In the hall of the State Council, in the presence of the court and its ministers, Symmachus addressed the emperor in a speech that was a model of Roman eloquence and patriotism. "Who is so great a friend of the barbarians," Symmachus asked, "that he does not regret the Altar of Victory? We are usually consumed by forebodings and avoid anything that may seem a bad omen. Let us at least respect victory, even though we may deny its divinity. You owe so much to it, my Lords, and will soon owe it still more. Let those spurn it who hate its power, who have not enjoyed its favours, while you, whom it has served, must not refuse its patronage for it holds for you the promise of triumph. Since victory is needed by all, and all wish it, why renounce its worship? Where shall we now swear allegiance to your laws and where hear your prescriptions? What religious awe will now deter the perfidious and prevent them from lying when they are called upon to be witnesses? I know that God is everywhere and there is no sure asylum for perjury, but I also know that nothing protects the consciousness from temptation more securely than the presence of a holy object. This altar is the guarantee of concord and the common loyalty of each and everyone."<sup>1</sup>

Symmachus argued that the rights of the ancient religion were hallowed by Rome's imposing past and by filial duty. It was not right, he said, to abolish old landmarks because they strengthened the spirit of the people.

Symmachus argued, too, that it was wrong to tear down a cult that had for so long favoured Rome. Speaking, as it were, in the name of the goddess of the Eternal City, he said:

"Revere the old age that I have reached under this sacred religion. Leave me my ancient objects of worship for I have never had cause to regret them. And allow me, since I am free, to live by my own books. My cult has subordinated the world to my laws. Sacrifices and sacred ceremonies have driven Hannibal away from my walls

and the Gauls from the Capitol. Was I saved then just to suffer shame in my old age? It is too late to require anything from me. It is a disgrace to change at my age.”<sup>2</sup>

Still, the speech of Symmachus was clear evidence that paganism had changed, that its monotheistic search had brought it closer to Christianity. It was no mere figure of speech for Symmachus to admit that the supreme being which people addressed in their prayers was one for all. But this outer resemblance apart, there was a distinct difference between the high moral principles of late Roman paganism and those of Christianity. The pagan Symmachus called for freedom of conscience by saying that people saw the same luminaries and had one and the same sky over them, and inhabited the same universe. Was it so important, he asked, in what way a person acquired the truth?

The noble ring of this approach aroused the contemporaries of Symmachus. Centuries later, it was recalled by Dante Alighieri and Cola di Rienzi, those two ardent advocates of the Italian people.

We will find Symmachus unusually broadminded for a Roman when assessing the religions of other peoples. He said all had their own customs and their own cults. Divine Reason, he said, appointed specific patrons for every country. While mortals were given a soul when born, every people had geniuses governing its fate. That is an excellent example of religious tolerance, the *leitmotif* of Symmachus' appeal. He did not want pagans to have privileges over Christians. All he wanted was equality before the state. He pleaded for freedom of worship and the right of every person to choose his own gods. This was humane. Even in later days.

The splendid speech of the high-minded Symmachus had its effect on the emperor and many members of his retinue. It seemed the pagan's mission would succeed. But the Christians were not prepared to concede ground. Symmachus was opposed by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, who was in his own way no less brilliant and no less revered than the former.

The curious thing was that Symmachus and Ambrose

were related. Both were offspring of the Roman clan of Aurelii. This only shows how dramatically Roman society was split by religious differences. For a while, Ambrose had been prefect of Northern Italy. He coped successfully with his duties and was known to be incorruptible, just, and kind. It came as a surprise to him to be made bishop of Milan. He had never previously thought of devoting himself to the church. He was a gifted administrator and brilliant speaker. And he wished nothing better than to be a statesman. But when the bishop of Milan died and Ambrose came to the cathedral to pacify the troubled crowd, the people unanimously offered their prefect that high office. It was not without hesitation that Ambrose accepted it. As bishop, he used his extraordinary abilities of administrator and organiser, but also developed his inordinate gift of preacher, attaining peaks of eloquence comparable to those of the famous John Chrysostom in the East.

In his sermons he spoke fervently of the equality of all before God. He said the Earth belonged to all, and appealed for charity, defended the poor, and condemned their oppressors. More, he opposed the unlimited right to property, saying Nature had created the right of joint ownership, while appropriation created private ownership. Ambrose's authority was enormous. So the final battle between paganism and Christianity was fought by two most worthy opponents, imparting to it the effect of a genuine tragedy.

In his fairly long reply to Symmachus, Ambrose blunted the main points in the former's speech, reducing them to just two: the demand to perform old rites, and to pay salaries to priests and vestal virgins. The bishop of Milan's criticism of paganism was highly rational. He declared reasonably that, contrary to Symmachus, it was not gods but the valour of the legionaries that had brought Rome so many victories. It was absurd to believe, he said, that the outcome of any battle could depend on the divine will, because often victors and defeated worshipped the same gods. But all of Ambrose's rationalism and clear thinking evaporated into thin air

when he set about to explain the Christian view of history. Here he used the same arguments as Symmachus, the only difference being the terminology. He countered the pagan's call for toleration with a call to turn to what he called the one and only true God, because "it was never too late to learn the truth, and may he take shame who cannot mend his ways in old age. In old age (and this by a man who was then hardly 45—*V. U.*) it was not silver hair but character that deserved praise. It is no disgrace to change for the better."<sup>3</sup>

Ambrose claimed the same privileges from the state as had heretofore been enjoyed by the pagan priesthood. He placed the church higher, in effect, than the state, for, he argued, ecclesiastic power was superior to secular. Ambrose rejected religious tolerance, and awarded the right to existence exclusively to orthodox Christianity, whose heretical currents were to be wiped out along with paganism.

Inspired by Ambrose's message, the Christian poet Prudentius wrote a poem, *Contra Symmachum*, elaborating on the arguments of the bishop of Milan and ridiculing paganism in the style of Juvenal's caustic satire. He associated the greatness of Rome above all with the greatness of Christ, for, as he saw it, the great pagans of the past had, as Providence willed, laboured for the coming of the divine kingdom that would crown the history of Rome.

Following the passionate polemics, and owing to the boundless energy of the bishop of Milan, the petition of Symmachus was turned down. The state separated itself once and for all from paganism. The courtiers and townsmen behaved as people often do in similar cases. Having heard Symmachus with delight only the day before, they turned their backs on him.

The pagans tried pleading for the restoration of the Victory Altar in 389, and again in 391. But their voice was not heard, while the church demanded an end to paganism. In 391, Emperor Valentinian forbade pagan sacrifices on pain of confiscating property, dwellings, and land. Pagan temples were to be closed down or destroyed. On November 8, 392, Emperor Theodosius passed a still

more severe law, giving the start to a remorseless persecution of the adherents of the ancient religion.

To uproot paganism in the countryside was especially difficult, for peasants were more closely attached to their temples and local gods. The slight liberalisation under Emperor Eugenius, who followed Valentinian on the Roman throne, was shortlived and indecisive. And following the reunification of the Eastern and Western empires under Theodosius in 394, brutal anti-pagan laws were introduced throughout the realm. But Theodosius' claim thirty years later that no pagans were left in his empire, was premature to say the least.

Paganism was not rooted out a hundred and even two hundred years hence. It kept disturbing the church continuously, assuming new guises. Traces of Roman paganism survived in the domain of intellectual culture and in the people's consciousness. And the church was occupied searching for ways of destroying it, but, indeed, also for ways of assimilating it. Paganism had lost the battle against Christianity. But its demise was no more than illusory.

Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, a treatise that expounded new, medieval, notions of God, the world, society, and man, was clear evidence that paganism was still alive in the early 5th century.

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## **PAGAN WISDOM AND THE TRIUMPH OF AUTHORITY**

When Symmachus was in Milan to plead for the restoration of the Victory Altar, he also happened to recommend a young native of Numidia province, Aurelius Augustine, a recent Manichean auditor and now a devotee of Neoplatonism, to the position of professor of rhetoric. Soon, this Augustine would become one of the most implacable and gifted enemies of paganism. This may be an irony of fate vis-à-vis Symmachus, but certainly no historical paradox and rather a natural development in the swiftly changing and troubled times of the 4th and early 5th centuries.

Augustine was born in Tagaste, a town in Northern Africa, in the year 354. His family background predicated agonising spiritual search. His mother, Monica, whom he loved dearly, was a devout Christian. Pliant and patient, she succeeded in converting her son, and thereupon also her husband, to her faith. In those days, this was something many an imperious and determined lady had failed in. Priorly, his father had been a vivacious pagan eager to teach his son the art of rhetoric and the enjoyment of life.

Augustine was a highly capable but indolent student. He refused to learn the Greek language, which fact he later regretted, and did not like arithmetic. But in oratory he excelled all his mates. He was fond of the vivid pagan festivities still celebrated in Northern Africa. He delighted in enjoyments that were usual for his age but which he lat-

er severely condemned. In the midst of this, at nineteen, he read and was stunned by Cicero's dialogue, *Hortensius* (which has not come down to us).

Augustine recalls, "I felt myself changing as I read it. All my vainglorious hopes vanished from my mind, and I felt an enormous and incredible thirst for wisdom and immortality."<sup>1</sup>

Augustine became engrossed in philosophy. He turned to the greatest authorities of Greek thought in the search for wisdom. In that world of meditation he would, indeed, describe Cicero as "our friend Tullius" who had adapted Hellenic philosophy in Latin and made it "perfect".<sup>2</sup> Those words Augustine spoke already after he had been converted to Christianity.

But the wise sayings of the philosophers soon ceased to satisfy him. He found too much refined order in them bordering on vanity, and too little soul and piety. It appears his mother's instructions, which had taken deep root in the young man's heart, neutralised the instructions of the sages. But after his disappointment in philosophy, Augustine did not at once turn to Christianity. He was still in the thrall of rhetoric and classical literature (the liking for which, indeed, he retained to his dying day). He became a tutor, a professional teacher of rhetoric, first in his native Tagaste and then in Carthage, selling the "art of victorious loquacity for money".<sup>3</sup> His fame spread, while his private life abounded in affection and love. He had a mistress (though later he roundly condemned his illicit affair) who bore him a son, Adeodatus, whom he dearly loved.

The thirst for more universal recognition of his rhetoric gift prompted Augustine to leave his native Africa for Rome, where, to be sure, he failed to attain the success he had been hoping for. Then he moved to Milan, where he became professor of rhetoric through Symmachus' intervention.

Augustine parted from his mistress but not from his disorderly way of life. Though this did not prevent him from pursuing his spiritual search. Having lost his taste for



philosophy, he became a Sceptic. Then, for nearly nine years, he was a Manichean.

Manicheanism had come to Rome from the East. It was said to have been founded in the 3rd century by the legendary Mani, who had come from India and had preached in Central Asia and Persia.

Mani was decidedly influenced by the dualism of the Persian religion. He spoke of the clash of two principles, those of good and evil. God, he declared, was the good, and filled all things, abiding in the souls of humans. But the kingdom of God, the realm of the Spirit and Light, was not the only existing kingdom. It was opposed by the kingdom of Evil and Darkness ruled by the Devil, the anti-pode of God. The evil powers produced man's flesh. And to shake off the evil powers he had to overcome his carnal desires, making his choice between good and evil, light and darkness. During his life on earth man's spirit should combat evil and help secure the final victory of good over evil.

Manicheans held that when the rule of darkness had reached its extreme, the God of Light came into the world and called himself Jesus Christ. He was not human. His body was incorporeal. Giving vent to his hatred, the spirit of darkness arranged for the crucifixion of that incorporeal body. But its assumed death was a triumph for the spirit of Light and the symbol of deliverance of all souls from Satan's power.

Mani preached a rigid asceticism, renunciation of all the joys of secular life. After death, he taught, the soul of the blessed was purified by water and fire, and resided in the kingdom of everlasting life. Souls that were immersed in carnal pleasures, on the other hand, went through a cycle of transmigrations until they felt a need for perfecting themselves. After the final triumph of the spirit of light over the spirit of darkness, all souls were reunited in the good kingdom. Matter would remain inert and dead, though evil would still reside in it, creating a potential threat to the good.

Mani was executed, but his teaching spread with incredible speed throughout the Mediterranean countries, and

reached the Roman Empire. Mani's creed tended at times to merge with the Mithraism of the Persians and the creed of Christ. But it was invariably and uncompromisingly dualistic, and may be found at the root of various heresies of the 3rd to 6th centuries and, indeed, of the Middle Ages, prompting their devotees to dream of a kingdom of light, justice, and equality.

Manicheanism left an indelible trace on Augustine's views, for he was not able to overcome the acute dichotomy of good and evil as the two great cosmic principles in human existence. As time went on, however, Augustine became disappointed in Manicheanism, as he had once been disappointed in the pagan philosophy. The last straw was his meeting Faustus, the Manichean bishop, to whom he turned in the hope of at last attaining the truth. In fact, however, he was discouraged by the superstitiousness and ignorance of Mani's followers, and Faustus' open-hearted admission that he had accepted the views of his spiritual tutors as an article of faith, never doubting the verity of the Manichean creed and never turning to reason and the secular sciences.

For Augustine this was sheer ignorance. Though a few years later, on becoming a Christian, he would call for the very same thing, asserting the primacy of faith over reason. The only difference would be that the faith was not Manichean but Christian. Augustine rejected what he would later use himself, and this, I feel, is most typical of him. It will occur in his attitude towards the Platonists, and the Donatists, and secular knowledge.

Turning his back on Manicheanism, Augustine again embraced philosophy, hoping thus to season his mind and soul, and overcome the contradictions that tortured him. Plato helped him set aside any "material" notions of god. Augustine's thinking became more metaphysical and "spiritual". In Plato's god, that demiurge and artificer of the world, he spotted an analogy with the Logos of Christianity. But it was a god too great and too distant from the suffering of the oppressed and wretched, to satisfy a man looking for answers not only to "cosmic" questions but

also to the searchings of the human soul, a soul downtrodden and paltry, and thirsting to learn how to live righteously in the sinful and brutal world, helping people acquire hope of salvation.

Under Bishop Ambrose's influence, Augustine began gravitating towards Christianity. Here we might recall that in his younger years, when he first read the Bible, he had arrogantly condemned it as foggy and dull. He had said truth could not be presented so unprepossessingly. When he was almost thirty, his impression changed. Lack of polish redoubled the impact that the Bible made on him. He saw it as the supreme truth, all the more convincing for being so simply set out. Ambrose's sermons and the example of his life only strengthened Augustine's determination to embrace Christianity. But the carnal lusts of the body, "the stupidest of stupidities, the vainest of vanities", and old friends, made him procrastinate. "They tugged at my robe and whispered into my ear," he recalled later. "Do you mean to abandon us? A minute, and you will be with us no more! Another minute, and so much will be forbidden you forever! ...That was enough to hold me back. I felt I could not move when old habits asked: 'Can you live without us?'"<sup>4</sup>

To prepare for his baptism, Augustine withdrew to the estate of his friend Cassiciacum. But the life he led was neither solitary nor contemplative. He had his family and students, whom he continued teaching rhetoric and philosophy. Cicero, too, was still his faithful companion. Augustine occupied himself with the affairs of the estate, but beneath the surface thoughts assailed him. He wrote a few philosophical dialogues: *Contra Academicos*, *De Vita Beata*, and others.

Reading his writings of that time one wonders if combating Plato's followers had really been so vital. True, in the 4th century, Neoplatonism still contended against Christianity. But the battle was clearly unequal. Not only because after the defeat of Julian the Apostate paganism had been renounced by the state and doomed to certain death. Pagan philosophy was withdrawing increasingly into a shell. It was becoming too abstruse and recondite,

and deliberately emphasised its elitist character, merging with theurgic trickery and investing knowledge with esoteric mystique.

Philosophers like Iamblichus, for example, acquired the reputation of wonderworkers and sorcerers. Yet on the other hand, Neoplatonism was gravitating ever more towards logico-dialectical constructions. Both tendencies, I might add, blended in the works of Proclus, that last of the great teachers of the Neoplatonic school in Athens.

The philosophical refinements of the Neoplatonists struck no response even in the hearts of the pagan mass, whose ranks were steadily thinning. Nor did they always strike a response among the pagan elite, such as Libanius, the brilliant Greek Sophist and rhetorician.

The Neoplatonists withdrew into a shell. Augustine was aware of it. The dialogues he wrote before his baptism were not apparently meant to strike down any real adversary. They were to allay his own doubts, to settle an inner struggle that was sapping his strength.

Philosophy, Plato's doctrine in particular, which had once been the embodiment of wisdom, ceased to be for Augustine the truest and the most pleasant harbour.<sup>5</sup> Now his meditations led him to Christianity. He told himself that the search for the truth (so important a part of the pagan philosophy) had yielded none of the desired bliss, that bliss came with the truth (which, in the Christian belief, was out of the reach of pagans). Augustine neither questioned nor criticised the contentions of philosophy. He simply negated philosophy in the name of faith. He simply killed the philosopher within himself both unconsciously and deliberately. And that agonising process moulded him into a theologian and eminent practitioner of the Christian church. Finally, on April 25, 387, prompted, as he put it, by his faith, and supported by the "supreme" grace, Augustine was baptised with his friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus. But upon becoming a Christian, he did not entirely cease to be philosopher and rhetorician. Nor could he totally renounce his past even when elected bishop of Hippo.

After all, Christianity, too, was an offspring of the antique world, even though it would not admit it. Subjectively, Augustine was dismayed that he could not entirely shake off the heritage of the antique culture, having been steeped in it in his younger years. Objectively, Augustine performed an important historical mission: he carried out a synthesis of the antique culture and Christianity. In its absence the new religion could not have become what it was for medieval Europe.

Augustine's concept was in no way conclusive. That is why any attempt at reconstructing it leads involuntarily to simplification. But this inconclusiveness was the reason why his teaching was used with equal success by the official church, orthodox theology, and bearers of various heresies. Augustine was Catholicism's tower of strength, but also a tower of strength of the Protestants in their fight against Catholicism. Even today, Christian theologians and philosophers who will not abide by the rationalistic limitations of Thomism, are again referring to Augustine, who provided models of Christian self-analysis and psychology.

In his *Soliloquia*, a dialogue Augustine wrote directly before his conversion to Christianity, he defined his aim as follows: "I want to cognise God and the Soul."<sup>6</sup> And since God was for Augustine the absolute and true being, the solely existing being that willfully created the world and man, cognition of God and the Soul was for him, in effect, complete and all-embracing, including cognition of the world. Thus, Augustine gave currency to the medieval philosophical triad: God—World—Man. This was the framework for the theoretical thinking of the feudal era.

Two things especially occupied Augustine's mind: psychology, the predestination of man, and the philosophy of history. Neither Greek nor Latin literature had priorly known anything comparable to the profound self-analysis, the all-encompassing and subtle study of the psychology of the individual that we find in Augustine's *Confessiones*. In *Confessiones*, I should say, man's soul is illuminated from inside, as it were—full of doubts, vulner-

able, at the same time firm and staunch. Depicting his life from its very beginning, Augustine noticed that man's inner world was not a definite and immutable entity; it kept changing and developing itself.

In the early Middle Ages, *Confessiones* did not get the acclaim it deserved. It was not until Peter Abelard and Dante Alighieri found and extolled it that it attracted the attention of many a conspicuous figure of the European cultural firmament, including Petrarch, Rousseau, and Leo Tolstoy.

We have no reason to disbelieve Augustine when he says he needed no proof to acquire the true belief. But what an individual tends to assert about himself in complete good faith need not necessarily be the complete truth. It is only a subjective expression. This, I should say, is true in Augustine's case, for he not only craved to believe, but also desired to understand. Because all the works that he wrote before his baptism or directly after it were in the final count philosophical or, in any case, a search for the truth in communication not only with God, but also with wisdom.

The confusion he must have experienced at the time cannot explain away the fact that the as yet relatively young Augustine, living in the villa of his friend Cassiciacum, came suddenly awake in the middle of the night and searched for the reason for his rude awakening. He reflected first of all upon the order of the world, and discovered that he had been awakened by strange interruptions in the gurgling of the stream flowing past the villa: falling autumn leaves formed a natural dam that burst from time to time under the pressure of the water. This minor episode led Augustine to write a treatise, *De Ordine*, in which he reflected on the orderly fitness of things in the world.

Augustine could not entirely cease to be a philosopher, because he came to embrace Christianity not only through the suffering of his soul, but also through the inquiries of his reason. That is why, in his *De Ordine*, he asks: "To say that all philosophy should be avoided is the same, is it not, as to say that wisdom should be avoided?"<sup>7</sup>

When bishop of Hippo, known for his piety and asceti-

cism, he would make a striking point in one of his letters. Discussing one of the apocryphal Gospels that contained a description of the Ascension of Christ escorted by Old Testament prophets and patriarchs, Augustine said he would lief add Plato, Cicero and Virgil to that assembly, for, to his mind, they had a premonition of God the Saviour: "Among the orators and poets who had put up the mythical gods for ridicule were those who worshipped the one God. But among those, too, who deluded themselves about God and honoured the creation rather than the Creator, there were those who had lived honestly and set a splendid example of parsimony, chastity, continence, contempt of death for the good of their country, and fidelity not only vis-à-vis compatriots but also enemies, and who were therefore entirely worthy of serving as models." <sup>8</sup>

In A. D. 427, a few years before his death (he died in 430, in Hippo besieged by the Vandals), in his *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine produced a striking comparison of a Christian who borrows the most valuable elements from pagan authors and uses them for the glory of his doctrine to the biblical Israelites who, as the Gospel says, carried off golden vessels from Egypt and dedicated them to their god.

Utilisation of pagan wisdom and the works of the ancient sages to assert Christianity, to enrich it culturally, was a concern to which Augustine, like certain other church fathers, devoted himself to the end of his life.

It should be remembered that Christianity sprang up as a religion of the oppressed and disfranchised, as a non-Roman religion, in fact, in a world where the Roman's name was a synonym of the word "man". The historian Paulus Orosius wrote in the late Roman era that wherever he went, even if he knew no one, he was free of fear for he was "a Roman among Romans ... a man among men".<sup>9</sup> True, the sentence also contained the words "a Christian among Christians", but a few more centuries had to pass before these notions became closely associated. The original Christian religion was persecuted. Indeed, the persecution continued for more than two

centuries.

But for all this, Christianity came forward from the moment of its inception as the sole universal religion that would reign not only over the souls of all men, but also over all secular authority, because it was founded not by a mere Prophet but directly by God himself, who became the man and whose suffering redeemed the sins of the human race.

To make good its ideological, political and moral claims, the new religion had had to defeat the powerful pagan religions which had tremendous state support — to become indispensable to the state, and to capture the minds of the mass of the people.

In just three and a half centuries, Christianity developed from the creed of a handful of ignorant provincials and aliens into the most widespread religion of the Roman Empire. This paved the way for its winning the imperial court. But here, strange as it may seem, Christianity faced a problem that had seemingly been solved: to become a truly universal religion, to win not only the political helm but also the minds of all men, Christianity had to overcome not simply the pagan cults, but the culture of a long era, a culture impregnated in the consciousness of the people, in its loftiest spiritual activities, in the entire system of education and way of life.

In the antique Greco-Roman culture Christianity had once found the ideas for its postulates. After gaining some strength, it rejected this culture as the progeny of the hostile pagan world. The vain secular knowledge that was the pride of the Hellenic and Roman worlds, had no value at all in the eyes of the early Christians, for, as they saw it, it was contrary to the true wisdom that God put into the souls of those whom he had chosen. The New Testament says, "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt., 5:3). Apostle Paul, in his message to the Colossians, warned: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

This attitude towards secular wisdom flowed from the



fundamental principles of Christianity. If God is the supreme truth, then truth is unknowable, because God cannot be an object of imperfect knowledge. God's wisdom can only be given in the Revelation, that is, in the Bible; hence true science in the eyes of the Christian is comprehension of the Word of God, interpretation of its sense, that is, not knowledge in the true meaning of the word, but exegesis. The content of Christian theology is given immutably, once and for all; open to discussion are only the ways of probing the sense or meaning of a word. It follows that whatever human reason may do, it will in the final count always return to where it started from. True science, and for a true Christian this science can only be the science of God, cannot and must not apply its principles to anything sensually apprehensible. It does not need logical balance or mathematical precision. It reposes on the written word of God taken in unity with legend and tradition. In the light of the faith, it examines the whole truth contained in the sacrament of Christ. Hence another two features: recognition of the "naturalness" of the miracle as a peculiar bridge from the realm of ideas to the sphere of life (yet a miracle, whatever artful interpretations are resorted to, opposes rational knowledge), and the need for the moral saturation of knowledge or conversion of knowledge from rational knowledge into ethical and religious knowledge.

Early Christianity derived its strength from its ability to react swiftly to social and political change without conceding any of its original positions, and also from its ability to quickly absorb from the pagan world, the pagan ideology and culture, anything that was likely to make it (and did make it) more powerful.

The priest gradually turned from a spiritual shepherd into a kind of spokesman for the administration, as was the case, among others, with the Western bishops, whereas in the realm of ideas Christianity turned gradually from an exclusive doctrine into a broad, many-layered ideology that had assimilated a significant portion of the antique cultural legacy. True, this took a number of centuries.

One of the earliest extant writings of the 2nd-century Christian apologists, belonging to Aristides, placed unquestioning faith above reason. But at about the same time there surfaced a Christian current that acknowledged the value of the antique culture and, indeed, named possible ways of utilising it for the good of the Christian teaching. Justin the Martyr, who wrote in Greek, suggested that the pagan wisdom was a lower layer, a prop, for the true wisdom of the Revelation, which was the highest authority that came directly from God. Justin endeavoured to prove, too, that the best elements in the pagan culture were (though unconsciously) either borrowed from the revelations of the biblical prophets (as Plato, he claimed, had borrowed ideas from Moses) or in some other way associated with the Bible, and were therefore useful and usable in furthering the spread of the Christian religion.

This line of reasoning was picked up and continued by Clement of Alexandria and Origen Adamantius, both fathers of the Christian church in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries. Clement was convinced, for example, that in his *Republic* Plato had anticipated the coming of the Messiah, for he furnished a description of a godly man who had been crucified.

Still, the prevalent tone of the early apologetics was aggressive, consisting of ferocious attacks on the pagan culture. And the Latin apologists, who were less scrupulous as to choice of methods of criticism, especially Tertullian, were the most ferocious. Tertullian hailed from Carthage and lived in the time of Septimius Severus. He was converted to Christianity in his middle age and became its most ardent, even zealous, champion.

Was his zeal due to his character and the peculiar features of his past life? Partly so, but it was also due to the fact that he lived at a time when Christianity was turning into a religion of the masses, winning ever new converts, and this also among the higher placed and more prosperous segments of society. Growing into a socially significant force, it no longer needed apology but rather aggressiveness. And a better man for this purpose than the

quick-tempered and rigoristic Tertullian would have been hard to find. He declared that there could be nothing in common between Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church, a philosopher and a Christian, or an offspring of Greece and Heaven.

For Tertullian faith was immeasurably higher than any science. Its absolute superiority made it incomparable to reason. Only a person free of science could be a real Christian, for a soul untainted by knowledge was endowed with lofty moral principles.

Tertullian's categorical maxims were described in the Middle Ages as *credo ad absurdum*, though he himself had never used that phrase.

All the same, Tertullian was not entirely foreign to the influences of Roman rhetoric. In fact, he used some methods of the antique culture to attack that culture. It will be only fair to say, however, that Tertullian's nihilistic treatment of reason, philosophy, and knowledge had no fewer, if not more, adherents in the Middle Ages than the "moderate attitude" of Justin and his followers.

Arnobius Afer, another Christian apologist who lived a hundred years after Tertullian and who had the pleasure of witnessing Christianity's official recognition (he died in 327), maintained that human wisdom was nothing more than foolishness in face of the First God. Neither philosophical constructions nor secular knowledge could lead to knowledge of God, and were, therefore, in his opinion, useless. But Arnobius did not reject them out of hand. Though reason was not a reliable guide, he said, a man's soul remained a blank sheet if he was not taught anything. Consequently, he added, there was some use from knowledge and education, provided they were directed by faith.

This dualistic approach was still more distinct in Lactantius, whom posterity described as the Christian Cicero. While condemning the pagan wisdom and pagan literature, Lactantius did not shrink from imitating their finest models. He was engrossed in a search for the true wisdom. While identifying it with the Christian teaching, he was eager to devise a philosophy for it, to create a sort of phi-

losophico-Christian synthesis, and here anteceded Augustine.

The idea of blending pagan education with Christian culture was the dominant note in the dialogue *Octavius* by another apologist of Christianity, one Minucius Felix (3rd century). But in the 4th century Tertullian again acquired a worthy successor: Firmicus Maternus, who called for the destruction of the pagan cults, and with them of all the pagan culture.

Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, poet and writer of psalms, and one of the founders of monasticism in the West, strove to adapt pagan learnedness to the needs of Christianity. In search of better forms for the organisation of monasticism, he even travelled to the East, where he studied Greek, theology, and philosophy. Indeed, he tried to use the wisdom he had gained, partly from the pagans, to buttress dogmatic theology.

Marius Victorinus, distinguished by his learnedness and thorough knowledge of ancient philosophy, translated the works of Neoplatonists into Latin, and devoted much of his time to studying logic. He did not doubt the usefulness of the pagan wisdom. He merged reason and faith. But in fact his faith often conceded ground to reason. The philosopher in him was far stronger than the theologian.

Ambrose of Mediolan, the most brilliant preacher in the Western world of the 4th and 5th centuries, who had done so much for bringing together the Western and Eastern currents of Christianity, was quite noticeably influenced by the culture of rhetoric, especially that of Cicero. And though he opposed paganism quite firmly and unambiguously, and played a decisive part in the final stage of the struggle against the ancient religion, he also showed an interest in some aspects of antique knowledge.

Another father of the church, Jerome (340-420), was a man of three languages. At no point in his life was he able to conquer the Ciceronian in himself. An ardent admirer of the pagan authors, he referred to "our Tullius", "our Horace" and "our Virgil" in his writings, leading to

conclusions that were paradoxical for a devout Christian and that often eclipsed the "light" of the Gospel.

A pupil of Aelius Donatus, a famous Roman grammarian, Jerome had always preferred linguistic search to philosophical definitions. He was fluent in Hebrew and Greek, and performed a work that paved the way for the autonomy of the Western church. Seeing that the translation of the Bible into Latin, known as the *Itala*, was far from faithful to the official text of the Holy Writ, he undertook to alter it on a basis of extensive linguistic comparisons. He produced a new translation of the Old Testament, revised the translation of the New Testament, and also improved a number of other canonical texts. The Western church owes the Latin version of the Bible, known as the *Vulgate*, to Jerome and Jerome alone.

His commentaries on the Bible and other works, numerous and diverse in subject-matter, style and language, were widely read in the Middle Ages. His vivid and simple lives of hermits were especially popular. A man of wide-ranging knowledge, Jerome writing the lives seemed to forget his favourite antique authors and all literary refinements. The legends he related were a prelude to later Latin lives written for the medieval reader.

Jerome was at the source of the trend that came to the surface in the activity of Pope Gregory the Great. It differentiated between religious consciousness and theological practices with an eye to securing the greatest possible influence on the mass of the people. This created an intrinsically differentiated (and hence often more effective) unity of ideology feeding the minds, souls and feelings of believers and meeting their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional needs, while directing them along a rigidly defined course. As for the question of Antiquity, Jerome and Gregory differed. The former thought quite sincerely that it should be adapted to Christian needs.

The activity of the Christian apologists and fathers of the church shows that those who had rejected pagan wisdom and those who sought to create a symbiosis of pagan wisdom and Christianity — that all of them had graduat-

ed from the school of rhetoric, the rhetorical culture, which shaped their thinking, and their way of arguing. Indeed, the antique cultural legacy, whether negated or accepted with reservations, was a nutritive medium in the absence of which Christianity could not have flowered so abundantly. It grew and perfected itself in the polemic against pagan culture, gaining philosophical depth thanks to that most worthy and learned opponent. It is no accident, after all, that Christian writings devote so much space to the doctrines and arguments of the pagans, and to their criticism.

In the drive for supremacy, the critics unconsciously adopted the ploys of the criticised, the winners learned from the losers. And it is hard to say whether the losers were really losers, for often enough they caught the winners in their toils, making them think and write as they would themselves. The pagan intellectual and linguistic culture and learning gradually penetrated the flesh and blood of Christianity. But this did not soften Christianity's attitude towards paganism. Quite the contrary. Borrowing the opponent's weapons, it became still more impatient of him, and still more aggressive.

But back to Augustine's treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*, which he wrote specially for the edification of clerics. It dealt with religious education, underlining the virtues and advantages of Christian literature which Augustine managed to discover and arrange in a system after an effort of several decades. He pointed out that the necessary conditions for understanding that literature were fear, piety, and learning. The curious point, however, is that Augustine considered school learning essential, because grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, mathematics, and history would lead the reader closer to the Holy Writ rather than away from it. Pagan learning, he held, should be among the tools used in acquiring access to the ultimate truth.

Augustine asked if it was fitting for a Christian preacher or tutor to use rhetoric, which had indeed been discredited by the false pagan teachings. Here is his own reply: "Since the gift of speech has been granted to all, the good as well as the evil, why should not

decent people strive to acquire it if the indecent use it to secure the triumph of delusions and injustices?"<sup>10</sup>

School learning acquired in one's younger years, Augustine maintained, could not obstruct spiritual conversion and acquisition of the truth in the Christian teaching. It was bad, Augustine held, if secular learning served vain aims and led the subject away from the truth. He pointed up the applied significance of schooling. It was not harmful by itself, though if wrongly administered it could doom a person to perdition. But Augustine did not consider school learning obligatory. He assumed that any clever and reasonable person could become learned on his own, though in that case he should not use pagan models but the finest models of Christian eloquence. Eloquence must follow faith, he said, not vice versa. Nor should pagan learning be seen as an aim in itself.

Augustine tolerated pagan wisdom and literature, but only to the point where they could confirm or strengthen the Christian teaching, that is, where they were subordinated to faith, that is, duly emasculated and interpreted. He wanted to utilise the heritage of Antiquity, but went about it with methods that differed from those used by the Last of the Romans.

Augustine, as I have already said, was a sufficiently learned man, though his learning could hardly be described as systematic and thorough. He drew on all the sources of antique wisdom, but his education was disorderly and often meagre. Still, thanks to the power of his intellect, he managed to penetrate deep into various domains of antique science and culture. Not only was he a brilliant rhetorician, but also had a profound understanding of pagan philosophy, a knowledge of mathematics and partly of the natural sciences, and knew his way about in classical literature. True, his learning was cut down to size by school tradition. His education was, as it were, mediated, as was typical in those days.

Soon after his baptism, Augustine wrote a series of treatises devoted to what he called the liberal arts, notably music, and the tasks of a teacher. This flowed from Augustine's conviction that study of the liberal sciences, if

kept within certain limits, enlivened the mind, gave it greater mobility and strength, prompting it to strive for the truth more fervently.

We need not go into the specific content of what Augustine put down in the liberal arts syllabus. It is quite certain that the very fact of their being included as a basic element of Christian culture, and included by so great an authority as Augustine was in the Middle Ages, played a conspicuous part in the subsequent development of education and culture. Because, in one way or another, it meant that antique knowledge and the Roman system of education gained recognition in the new historical and ideological environment.

It should be noted, however, that Augustine's own attitude towards pagan wisdom and the antique system of education tended to change fairly substantially in his lifetime, and was anything but final. Augustine would not have been a Christian thinker if he had failed to assert the primacy of faith over reason. But he did not at once categorically maintain this primacy. In his *De Ordine* he still insisted that "authority is primary in relation to time, whereas reason is primary in relation to the substance of the matter".<sup>11</sup> Yet in his *Soliloquia* he exclaimed, "I plead with you, God the truth, in which, from which and through which everything that is true; God's wisdom, in which, from which and through which everything that is wise... God's clever light, in which, from which and through which everything that is alight with reason."<sup>12</sup>

At first he had tried to justify the primacy of faith by the need for obeying authority: "It is one thing, after all, when we believe authority," he wrote, "and another when we believe reason. Faith in authority shortens matters considerably, and does not call for effort. If you wish, you can read extensively what great and godly men have written on this score out of condescension, finding it [faith] essential for the edification of simpletons and demanding trust from those for whose souls, more dull-minded or preoccupied with worldly concerns, there could be no other means of salvation. People of that



sort — the enormous majority — are most easily fooled by the semblance of reasoned conclusions whenever they venture on attaining the truth by means of their reason.... For these people it is better to believe a dependable authority, and to live accordingly.”<sup>13</sup>

Gradually, Augustine's view of the relationship between faith and reason became more rigid. Especially after he became bishop of Hippo. He gravitated more and more to interpretations of the Old Testament. His ideas of wisdom shifted increasingly from the philosophico-religious to the exclusively religious domain. In his *Confessiones* he defined wisdom as piety, and, what is more, piety that must necessarily repose on “fear of God”. Love of wisdom thus became veneration and love of God. Augustine ranked learning third and lowest after piety and fear of God.

Though Augustine never went so far as to totally negate reason, for he never considered it an obstacle to faith but rather its buttress, he did give learning the Gospel priority over philosophy and secular scholarship. More, any curing of the soul, which the ancients always considered the job of philosophy, Augustine assigned exclusively to divine grace and the blessings of the Almighty. So, his rationalism turned out to be rather limited. As a result, he treated both philosophy and the liberal arts with a fair share of scepticism. He did not see them as unfailing paths to true knowledge. Rather than give the soul genuine freedom, he held, they tended to ensnare and lead it from the eternal to the transient and natural.

Augustine attacked the antique poetry, which he said reminded him of godless parables and fables. He attacked what he called the idle prattle of philosophers and the mendacity of rhetoricians. He was annoyed that friends continued to turn to him for explanations of sciences rather than spiritual advice. In his *Confessiones* he compared secular learning to wine, and lamented that teachers who had downed their cup were prompting young people to do the same. He fiercely protested against habits that carried people away like a stream and finally drowned the truth in an ocean of prejudices and lies.

At the end of his life, Augustine subordinated education entirely to the interests of the church. Christian literature, its study and interpretation, and preaching, became the main subjects in Augustine's system of education.

For Augustine, the meaning of knowledge changed as time went on. At first it meant knowledge of the surrounding world and knowledge of the transcendental attained in the process of cognition mainly by rational means. Such knowledge was subordinate to faith and was meant to confirm faith. He identified it with philosophy and science, including the liberal arts, which encompassed a certain sum total of the preceding human learning. In due course, Augustine took knowledge to be the verity of the Revelation, that is knowledge as a part of faith. This knowledge was neither philosophical nor scientific (even in the sense of "science" specific for that age), but what may be described as "theological", that is, meant for someone who was no adept of the religion concerned and, strictly speaking, as something that was a delusion rather than knowledge. Such knowledge, Augustine said, could precede faith. In other words, the person's mind could first grasp the truth of the Revelation, whereupon the person began believing.

In many ways, this was Augustine's own road to Christianity. For him, "theological" knowledge acquired by his reason formed what may be called a launching pad for faith. He observed that belief in God must be preceded by an understanding of certain things. Whereupon belief or faith made for a better appreciation of the substance of things. But could a man believe the preacher if he did not at least understand the preacher's language? Conversely, however, there were things that had to be believed before they could be understood.

Was Augustine's concept a justification of faith through reason? Was it a forerunner of the concept put forward in the Middle Ages by Abelard or the Averroists, followers of Averroës (ibn-Rushd)? The answer, I think, is negative. For Augustine's cognitive optimism was highly limited. And not only because for him the activity of reason had

natural and supernatural limits (that is, he believed that the ultimate truth apprehended by reason was a priori of a lower order than those given in the Revelation as the ultimate authority). Besides, for him the road of reason was imperfect and tortuous, whereas the road to the truth through faith was simple and convincing: man should look inside himself, for the immortal human soul enclosed a particle of divine light.

Augustine declaimed: "Try apprehending the supreme harmony: do not go outside yourself, concentrate upon yourself, because the truth lives in the inner man; if you find that your nature is fickle, rise above yourself and remember that the meditating soul is higher than you. Hence, strive to be where the light of reason is lit."<sup>14</sup>

Surmounting the doubts of the soul led to the truth, which was infinite in both space and time. Doubts which assailed the soul were an order above the doubts that reflected the wanderings of reason. That was why in wisdom the part that spoke of all-embracing knowledge pertained to God, while the part that was content to study phenomena pertained to man.<sup>15</sup>

It followed clearly enough that when Augustine spoke of knowledge and its association with the Revelation, he meant two sides of one and the same phenomenon. The thus conceived reason could not, of course, stand up against faith. Such reason was internalised in man, whereas the "searching" reason, that is, cognising reason in the modern sense of the word, was born of, and reflected, the sensual world and, consequently, in a certain sense, distorted the truth. The sort of reason that was akin to the reason of Greek philosophy, the "scientific" learning of the ancients, Augustine held, could not lead to the truth. The truth was immutable and everlasting. It was a necessary attribute of divine wisdom, the "prime substance". Whereas the world apprehended by philosophers and conceived through the perception of humans was no more than a reflection of the truth, and contained nothing but its imprints. But these were not the truth in the generic sense of the word. They were no more than its likeness. It followed, according to Augustine, that the "searching",

or, strictly speaking philosophic, reason was in effect useless for the act of acquiring wisdom or apprehending the truth. Consequently, philosophy and science were good for one thing only, namely, for being worked as a quarry from which to extract building material for the erection and strengthening of an entirely different edifice — the temple of faith.

Augustine's rationalism betrayed inconsistency also by attributing an important part in cognition to the intuitive, psychologically subjective apprehension of the objective truth in the process of which man "excelled" his own self, his individuality, and merged with the universal.

Reason, Augustine held, was vision of the soul whereby it glimpsed the truth without the medium of the body; it was either contemplation of the truth without the medium of the body or it was the truth that was contemplated.

Augustine turned not only to reason, but also to man's religious feelings, which, he said, were rooted in man from birth. Thus, the transcendental invaded the sphere of the intrinsic human existence.

Present-day attempts to modernise the Catholic Church owing to disaffection of the "rationalism" of the predominant Thomist doctrine, quite naturally address those aspects of Augustine's teaching which, if only faintly, appear to reflect existentialist search.

Augustine's "intuitive" quest resulted in that the church was compelled to "revise" theology in the 13th century and make it more rationalistic under pressure of a logicised Aristotelianism and incipient learning based on experience. This was done by Thomas Aquinas, with Augustine relegated to the background. But interest in Augustine revived in connection with the reformational aspirations of Martin Luther and his followers, who sought to replace the authority of the church with the authority of the Bible, and authority of theology with the authority of personal faith.

Augustine's interest in knowledge and in pagan philosophy and literature — something he had not been able to live down — prompted him to include them in the foun-

dation of the new culture, which he endeavoured to circumscribe with the help of the Scriptures. More significant for the Middle Ages in most cases, however, was Augustine's objective position after becoming a prelate rather than his subjective leaning towards some elements of the heritage of Antiquity.

Pagan culture did not confine itself to just philosophy, rhetoric, and the liberal arts. It was a world outlook, a vision of the world, a system of spiritual and ethical values, a special sense of beauty, and man's socialisation, his inclusion in social relationships, and education, and a life style, and many other things.

Augustine was steeped in that culture, having been born and raised within its orbit. So he was doubly zealous in renouncing its outlook and religion after his conversion to Christianity. But that is usual for any new convert. Though he unconsciously allowed elements of philosophy, rhetoric and antique learning, even aesthetics, to creep into his writings, he most vehemently condemned and most resolutely renounced the pagan culture as something specific, as the crucial element of paganism in general. First of all, this concerned paganism as a religion, which was one of the main pillars of the antique society and its culture.

So, converted to Christianity, Augustine had no doubts whatsoever that paganism should be uprooted, and that all means were acceptable to that end. He maintained that Christianity was incomparably higher than paganism, for it was illumined by God's Truth and Providence. Forgetting how agonising his own spiritual search had been, he condemned not only the pagans but also those who wavered. He was annoyed that the mass of the people showed lack of understanding of the new religion and a reluctance to follow its commands. During the Calends in January, people gave each other gifts, and played games clothed in animal hides and wearing animal heads, with men arrayed in female garb. Augustine was outraged that people believed in astrology and magic, and that they followed the most ludicrous prophesies. When sick, they turned to soothsayers and sorcerers who were

immersed in paganism. They adored public shows, the circus and theatre, and quite candidly preferred them to Christian worship.

If Augustine, a church father, condemned whom he thought to be remiss Christians so very severely, what could he say about the unconverted pagans? Even Doomsday did not seem to him too high a price to pay for the extirpation of paganism, that is, for the triumph of the ideas he was then promoting.

Augustine was convinced that the sack of Rome by the Goths was fair retribution to the pagans for having persecuted Christians and rejected the true religion. He built upon this thought in every way in the 24 books of his ambitiously conceived treatise, *De Civitate Dei* (413-427).

Historian Paulus Orosius, who was Augustine's disciple, wrote of *De Civitate Dei*: "The rays of that luminary had hardly appeared than they filled the whole universe!"<sup>16</sup>

Orosius explained that if God inflicted grief upon believers, he did so wishing to test their virtues or punish their vices; the reward for their suffering to those who bore it piously was everlasting bliss. Depicting the troubles of the world in his *Historia Adversus Paganos*, Orosius held that the capture of Rome by the Goths was not the worst thing that could have happened, considering that at one time the Amazons had devastated the world.

Augustine, of course, was more serious and conclusive in his arguments, but he, too, stressed in *De Civitate Dei* that this had not been the first painful experience in the history of Rome, which was only thereby paying the price of its godlessness, depravity, and the violence it had inflicted upon other peoples for successive centuries.

The bishop of Hippo hurled devastating criticism at paganism. In many ways, his attacks were consonant with the knockdown arguments of Ambrose of Mediolan and other fathers of the church. Indeed, it contained no few rationalistic points. Again, he maintained that Rome's grandeur reposed not on the grace of the pagan gods, but on Roman arms, the valour and prowess of its people, and

the acumen and wit of its rulers.<sup>17</sup> But, he asked, had the gods been able to prevent the many major defeats of the Greeks and Romans, had they been able to fend off the many misfortunes?

Augustine argued that the pagan gods could not be considered gods in the generic sense of the word, because they had once been mortals — rulers and sages and heroes who had lived before and whom people had subsequently begun to worship. To be sure, that argument had been repeatedly put forward by critical pagan writers, too, such as Varro and Plutarch. But for Augustine this meant that the pagan religion was no divine revelation, and had been devised by mortals.<sup>18</sup> Augustine pointed to the connection between the pagan religion and politics, showing that it was a tool used by the ruling elite. He considered paganism a conglomeration of immoral parables, and described the pagan gods as essentially a coterie of criminals and adulterers. The wise Plato and the devout Cato, he wrote, were more worthy of temples and worship than Saturn and Jupiter. Bishop Augustine summed up that paganism was immoral in general, and quite naturally never attempted, nor could it, to instruct people in moral ways and rectitude, though this, he maintained, was one of the main purposes of religion.

There was continuous squabbling between the pagan gods, he showed, over the sphere of Nature or human life that each was to control. Finally, paganism had not been able to work out a dogma, which, too, was evidence that it was not true.<sup>19</sup> Another argument brought forth by Augustine was that enlightened Greeks and Romans had never let an opportunity escape to demonstrate the weak points of their religion.

By depicting paganism as a creation of mortals, of life, an embodiment of society's ideas at a distinct stage of history, and thus negating it, Augustine renounced the society that had given it birth. On the other hand, he identified paganism and its gods with the rulers of darkness, with evil demons, and thus redoubled the hostility towards them, declaring them bearers of evil and, consequently portraying the culture that had given them birth

as a source of sin (which, in the Christian ideal, was to be overcome).

It bears repeating that Augustine's treatment of the pagan culture, of the antique legacy, was strongly contradictory. He had been reared on that culture as a Roman, and had indeed used its method when writing and preaching. As a Christian, he had naturally turned his back on it, but had not been able to do so in a consistent manner. As a church father and political figure, he called on people to fight against paganism, while as a philosopher and theologian he was compelled to draw upon it time and again in order to buttress the faith.

And as a maker of the new Christian culture that would reign in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, he was eager to assimilate a definite portion of the heritage of Antiquity with the aim of securing a new intellectual and cultural synthesis.

All these aspects certainly made an impact on the Middle Ages. Augustine's multiplicity paved the way for a relatively flexible system of spiritual life in which the antique legacy served as a continual fount of learning, philosophical rationalism, and a sense of the poetic.

The close attention that Augustine had paid to the antique culture (whether critical or, on the contrary, positive) would in due course serve as a sort of magnifying glass for the moving spirits of the Carolingian Renaissance, the philosophers and poets of the 12th century, which brought Antiquity closer to them. It was a fairly rough magnifying glass, to be sure, and would at times make things look bigger or smaller than life, and duller in texture. But that was not the main thing. For as a result, the legacy of Antiquity became incorporated in the medieval culture and served as a link between generations that had by its none too simple and conflicting existence cleared the way for the true Renaissance.

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## FREE WILL AND PROVIDENCE

At times of change, we want to know the cause and meaning of events. We try to find the answers, at least theoretically. They either justify or reject the present, define the historical goals, and suggest pertinent sociopolitical programmes. Human thought is actuated in the domain Voltaire described as the philosophy of history, where the social facts are conceptualised in retrospective studies and, sometimes, in constructions that arrange time and space in history.

The idea conceived in Christian terms at the juncture of Antiquity and the Middle Ages of rectifying the life of society bedevilled by ceaseless struggles and untractable contradictions pulled in different directions in East and West. Two 5th-century works summed up the intellectual achievements of the times and, indeed, provided ideological foundations for the impending era. One was Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, in which a keenly felt historicism reposed on an earnestly observed temporal principle, with the world conceived as history on the march. The other were the Areopagite writings ascribed to the pen of Dionysius, which portray the world as a cosmic hierarchy outside time and change.

The fundamental distinction between Augustine's Christian historicism and the Areopagite's Christian structuralism was a distinction between two currents that finally led to the division of Christianity into the Catholic

and the Orthodox churches. It would be a mistake to think, however, that the two currents went their two ways without crossing each other. The works of Pseudo-Dionysius or the Pseudo-Areopagite, which were translated into Latin in the 9th century, distinctly influenced many a medieval and Renaissance thinker, including Johannes Scotus Erigena, Thomas Aquinas, Marsilio Ficino, and Nicholas of Cusa, thus watering down Augustine's eschatological historicism and keenly felt temporality. It is generally held, on the other hand, that the works of Augustine gained no circulation in the Byzantine world. To the Eastern mind, the Christian eschatologism often stood for a spatial anti-historicism that grew over into an obsequious ideology of imperial statehood. This is clearly evident from such historical writings as those of Eusebius of Caesarea, the court historian of Emperor Constantine.

Yet the clash of the two currents, with the East rejecting Augustine's biblical historicism, influenced the ideological, cultural, and even political face of Europe for many centuries later. Indeed, it became a sort of constant element in the vision of the world, giving us the key to the medieval intellectual synthesis.

Augustine is sometimes called the maker of the philosophy of history. But that is not entirely correct. Certainly, Augustine was the first to produce a synthesised theory of the history of humanity (built on the principles and categories of his time). The good thing about it was that it tended to face the future more than look back at the past. No maker of systems (like Thomas Aquinas), Augustine nonetheless created an artistically elegant and structurally lasting framework for the spiritual environment of the Middle Ages, with the philosophy of history flowing organically from his vision and conception of the world.

Still, he fell back on Christian theology and historiography, pushing off from the specific historico-philosophical notions of the pagan thinkers, above all the Neoplatonists, for whom the everlasting instability of human existence was part of the temporal world as a structurally arranged

diversity. As they saw it, human acts, good or evil, useful or useless, were particular manifestations of the orderly motion of the universe as such, for man was but a particle of the cosmos, in which, in the final count, everything was the present and bereft of true development and, consequently, also of historicism.

For a Roman writing a history of events or phenomena meant giving substance to them in the immutable existence of the Eternal City (an appellation that, too, came from the Roman perception of the surrounding world), universalising them, making them "Roman history", or, as conceived by Romans, universal history.

Christianity negated the antique view of history. But it used some of the ideas of the ancient thinkers, compounding them with theological dialectics.

World history, in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition, was the history of a world moving in the continuum of time towards the supreme goal, man's redemption by God. In the antique view man's being was spatially and structurally determined, that is, statutorily and plastically fixed, whereas the outlook that was to be construed from the Bible was based on a fundamentally anti-statutory doctrine of creation that was taken to its logical conclusion by Thomas Aquinas, who defined God as *actus purus*, pure action.

For the Christian, all people were travellers and their lives nothing but a road in time measured off by such landmarks as the divine blessing, the promise, and motion, whose sense reached into the future when not only the prophecies of the Old Testament, but also those of the New Testament, would come true. The Creation was historical act. Hence, the long controversy about the act of creation having stopped or continuing. The Christian God, who acted not from inside (as Plato held) but from outside the world, being transcendental and acting on his eternal plan, created ever more new situations in time, and then, in effect, reacted to them in different ways. In His relations with the Israelites, in the apparition of Christ, and in the promise of future bliss for the pious he turned out to be indissolubly welded with the process of

history, and travelled the road of development in time together with the human race.

The compound of Christian theology and historiography fostered the latter's qualitative advancement and the merging of the Greco-Roman chronology with the new historicism. Classical models of Christian historiography appeared in the 4th and 5th centuries. They were aimed at creating not only a new universal and standard chronology, but also at proving the universality of history conceived as a process. For this was essential for showing that Christianity was primordial and the Revelation indisputably true. It was also essential to work in some pagan history and thus make the Christian fabric of history look respectable.

Out of the wish to prove the universality of the history of redemption there flowed the need for an all-encompassing philosophy of history. And it was this vital theoretical (and political) task that was tackled by Augustine, bishop of Hippo.

The foundation on which the philosophy of history and the whole world outlook of the Christian theologian reposed was the idea of the One Almighty God towering above the world He had created. He was an absolutely transcendental, infinite, integral, immutable, and omnipresent God who ruled the world because the world was His creation, and who allowed all creatures to direct their movements in a way that could be described as independent. According to Augustine, God was the absolutely true Being, the One substance that consubstantially united the three hypostases. This explained the unity of the First Cause and the Original Image (Logos), and the origin of all finite being.

This was the essential point of difference between Augustine and Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, who held that the Unity was the absolute prime principle which was above being, and to which being was subordinate.

For Augustine, the Christian God was above all a Subsistence, the Only Entity, that is, equivalent to pure being, immutable and eternal. This being was subsistence in

the absolute sense,<sup>1</sup> a subsistence that was perfection and goodness, and the Supreme Reason that put order in everything that moved towards the one goal. The notion of God as an immutable, immovable and inactive substance, hinges metaphysically on the correlation of being and conception, immutability and change, eternity and time.

The point of departure (according to the Christian doctrine) of motion, conception and time was the act of creation which, considering the substantiality of God, could be neither an emanation nor an arrangement of matter. It was the Creation through the free expression of God's will "out of nothing".

Augustine was convinced that no matter whatever was involved in God's act of creation, because if there was we would have to assume the existence of some other being alongside that of God—that is, the existence of some other substantiality, thus refuting God's omnipotence. Addressing God, the writer of *Confessiones* said: "Nothing existed apart from You before Your Creation, and ... all existing things depend on your Being."<sup>2</sup>

The Creation, Augustine reasoned, was a single act that brought into existence all the particulars of being which existed in the present and would appear in the future, until the end of time, in accordance with their "seminal logoses", that is, their peculiar embryonic forms unfolding in time. All forms and things of the world were created by God and were originally concentrated in Him, because He was the first model of all reality and His omniscience was supreme knowledge that embraced and penetrated all things.

Augustine identified the omniscience of the Old Testament with the evangelical Logos, the divine intellect that determined not only the general direction and principles of existence of everything in the world, but also the individual being of every single thing, containing at one and the same time its past, present, and future. Thereby, he held, it maintained a rational connection between God and His creatures.

The existence of the world proceeded in time. For this

reason Augustine considered it most important to grasp its elusive mystery. His philosophical arguments and psychological motivations in respect of time were astoundingly subtle.

Leaving aside the details, let us look at those aspects of Augustine's conception of time that have the greatest bearing on the philosophy of history.

Augustine asked: "For what is time? Who is able easily and briefly to explain what? Who is able so much as in thought to comprehend it so as to express himself concerning it? And yet what in our usual discourse do we more familiarly and knowingly make mention of than time? And surely, we understand it also, when in speaking with another we hear it named. What is time then? If nobody asks me, I know: but if I were desirous to explain it to one that should ask me, plainly I know not. Boldly for all this dare I affirm myself to know this much; that if nothing were passing, there would be no past time: and if nothing were coming, there should be no time to come: and if nothing were, there should now be no present time. Those two times therefore, past and to come, in what sort are they, seeing the past is now no longer, and that to come, is not yet? As for the present, should it always be present and never pass into times past, verily it should not be time but eternity. If then time present, to be time, only comes into existence because it passeth into time past; how can we say that also to be, whose cause of being is, that it shall not be: that we cannot, forsooth, affirm that time is, but only because it is tending not to be?"<sup>3</sup>

Augustine partly followed and partly departed from the philosophical idea which originated with Plato that eternity was a motionless image of time, an integral life unto itself, a constant entity foreign to all motion. Eternity was in substance a finite state that encompassed the past, present and future, all times, all the transience and flux of the world. It was an instant that contained within itself all the beginnings and all the ends, all the moments in time, and all development concentrated at one point, and therefore, in essence, negating all development, all motion, and time itself.

Such an eternity "seething" within itself was, in fact, absolutely static and immutable because it was untransformable.

As a result, everything that occurred in time was also in substance untransformable, aimless, and undirected. Typically, eternity and time were qualitatively different. But not different quantitatively. Eternity was the beginning that gave birth to, and determined, time. Eternity was repose, a zero duration, while time was pure duration, discrete, and transient. Eternity was wholeness and perfection. Nothing could happen with it or within it. It was completeness, self-satisfaction, and equilibrium.

Time was a departure from eternity, it was eternity's disintegration. Living in time, man appeared to be subject to eternity, and felt its pressures. That was why the Neoplatonists did not consider time as being history proper. Departing from eternity or ascending to it through spiritual self-perfection, man carried out the necessary restricted circular movement that negated development, which was one of the aspects of the logical genesis of an "intelligent eternity".

Augustine, too, thought that the Divine Being was associated with a constantly existing eternity that differed from time in quality, for the latter had no constancy whatsoever. But the Neoplatonists considered the birth of time a spontaneous process of expiration, and a violation of the fullness of eternity, with the result that time was taken to be infinite in quantity (contrary to the qualitatively conceived eternity), and the world turning out co-eternal with the One. As for Augustine, who believed in the Creation, for him God who created the world by his own will, also created time. Thus, time acquired an entirely unambiguous and definitely fixed beginning at the point when God created Heaven and Earth.

For the Christian theologian it was quite clear that "time would not have existed unless something had been created".<sup>4</sup> The world was created not in time, but *together* with time. God's eternity was not only the birth-giving cause of time, but a cause that created, because eternity, which existed always and constantly, which had neither



a future nor a past, was the source that gave birth to future and past times. The features that characterised time were its changeability, duration, linear direction, and finiteness.

Time, in Augustine's view, was made out of the aggregate of moments of motion, but was not the measure of motion (as Aristotle would have it). It was never in repose, was continuously in the act of becoming. The image of this becoming was impregnated in eternity, which concentrated it within itself in indissoluble unity. Like everything else that was created, time had two limits—the moment of birth and the moment of death, the completion of its being which occurred exclusively by God's will.

The idea of the free expression of God's will radically distinguished Augustine's conception from that of the Neoplatonists, according to whom the divine soul governed the world like Nature.

For Augustine, God possessed eternity and an eternal goal that was historically embodied in the life of Jesus Christ. The world did not exist as Nature. It proceeded as history with a beginning, a culmination point, and an end, a history that was filled with a profound sacramental purpose: God's redemption of humanity. To his mind, time was not movement in a circle (he was vehemently critical of the antique theory of rotation): it was open into the future and was therefore eschatological and teleologically complexioned.

Accordingly, Augustine defined two types of temporality—the infinite duration of the existence (*aevum*) of created substances that possessed a certain perfection and, consequently, were, in effect, unchangeable, such as angels, and age and world time (*saeculum*), which was not only the earth of people between the celestial and mundane cities but also a temporal continuum in which their interaction occurred. *Saeculum* was, in effect, the human and earthly time, a temporal reality that was eschatologically divided in anticipation of the ultimate fate of the world and man.

Augustine tried, too, to define the content of time not only by comparing it with eternity, but from inside, as it

were, in association with human life: "Bad times, hard times—that is something people never tire of repeating. But let us live well, and the times will be good. We are the times: how we are, so are the times."<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, apart from his philosophical profundity, Augustine possessed a good deal of realism.

He assumed that upon creating man God had not at once plunged him into what at first glance appeared to be a disorderly temporal element. The first phase in the life of Adam and Eve could hardly be described as entirely historical. It occurred in a specific kind of time, an *aeuum*. The act that really began the history of man, the determining episode of man's historical drama that gave birth to a chain of suffering, to continuous change in man's existence, fluctuating eternally between a striving for perfect being and downfall into nothing, into the emptiness of non-being or evil—this act was the Transgression, which had been the next step of Creation's severance from God following the severance of the angels.

By the Sin, Augustine did not mean separate vices but the fundamental, primordial and determining principle of human nature and history that flowed from man as a creature representing imperfect good and lacking stability in the divine order of the universe. He identified sin with the violence of the carnal lusts that pervade human existence. It was passed down from father to son by conception, making man an unconditionally and primordially sinful creature. This was no invention of Augustine's. It occupied a conspicuous place in the Christian theology, which accused man of the world's depravity.

The Sin, however, had not been conclusively determined by God (this shows the conflicting nature of Augustine's concept). For man was endowed with a free will, which set him apart from all other creatures. Augustine, indeed, went out of his way to show that an actually committed act of free will lay at the root of history. The imperfections of human nature, which the Neoplatonists qualified as the effect of the "incompleteness of being", became in the eyes of Augustine, the Christian theo-

logian, a "sin", that is, "a volitional evil". By his Transgression man created the first truly historical situation that provided God with the opportunity of carrying out His redemptive labours and set history in motion as the development and performance of the idea of the salvation of mankind from sin through Christ's sacrifice.

Adam's Original Sin lay in his disobeying God, and that sin sprang from Adam's nature as a human being. Man was punished for it by being stripped of his privileged place among other of God's creatures, by being expelled into the flow of time, instability, suffering, struggle, and death. As a result, "whatever length of time our life goes on, all this is subtracted from our whole life-span, and what is left becomes less and less each day, so that our present life is nothing but a race towards the goal of death—a race in which no one is allowed either a brief pause or the slightest slacking of pace, but all are propelled with a uniform motion and driven along with no variation in the rate of progress." <sup>6</sup>

Atonement for the Original Sin is, in substance, salvation from death, a preordainment of everlasting life, that is, man's redemption from time and, consequently, from history as a process of temporal human existence that is like a "whirling river" or "turbulent sea". And man's motion in that stream is directed by the divine will in accordance with the Creator's plan.

Augustine's conception reposed on the idea of order that emanated from God and directed everything in the world towards a single goal. He was influenced in large measure by the Neoplatonist notions of a world order reigning in a hierarchically organised cosmos. Yet he went farther, for he saw divine order not only in a state of immobility, but also in motion. It was remarkable, indeed, that the idea of his treatise *De Ordine*, came to him not when he was contemplating the vault of heaven or something as harmoniously organised, but when he noticed on a sleepless night that the babbling of a brook broke off from time to time. This ordinary fact prompted Augustine to meditate about the order of all being—an order

that acted in the world as God's Providence, imparting to it a definite goal.

Having taken from Plotinus the idea of the inexorably logical, that is, a world order rigidly determined by the Logos, beautiful and benign by nature, Augustine developed upon it in the spirit of Christian theism. Plotinus' fate (*pronoia*) he terms Providence (*providentia*), even Predetermination (*praedestinatio*).

For Augustine, the Christian theologian, God's will was the First Cause of everything in existence and of any motion. Its manifestations in the world of nature and the intelligible world were not all alike. Hence, Providence was of two types—natural and volitional. Divine Providence was not an immanent law of the world (as the Neoplatonists would have it), and originated from a divine plan that existed before the Creation. In nature, Providence acted as an order of bodies and their motion in space and time, effected by God directly through hidden causes which He had vested in all things.

In spheres where angels and humans existed, Divine Providence imparted order to their motion in time and acted through their wills, which appeared on the surface of things as the direct causes of their actions but were really expressions of God's will, and therefore secondary. People were God's workers who carried out his plan. They could not, therefore, be considered the true makers of history because, in the final analysis, they could not be held responsible for their deeds (here Augustine was at loggerheads with the antique historians, who saw self-existing meaning in the deeds of humans). At the same time, the actions of people and whatever happened to them was of special significance, because they were fragments of the general constructive process, of motion towards one goal, towards the outcome that God's will had ordained for man in the general course of the universe.

Medieval historians will find this idea highly fruitful. Viewing history as the materialisation of God's plan (*Gesta Dei*), they endowed it with a profound meaning; in their view it was intrinsically governed by law and organised in time. In the opinion of Friedrich Schiller, who

saw the idea in a romantic light, world history was world judgement, because the intensity and meaning of human deeds and events did not acquire a criterion until they were assessed in the context of the general state of the historical process and its intrinsic purpose. This approach to history proved fruitful for all subsequent historiography.

Augustine maintained that God's Providence constructed earthly kingdoms, and the One God administered and disposed of everything to suit his will.<sup>7</sup> Hence, he said, it was man's duty to obey, to be an obedient tool of God's Providence.

The Original Sin could not be overcome by the personal efforts of the first man or his descendants. While he had been free to fall, man lacked the freedom to rise. His choice did not solve the problem of salvation. Once he had committed the Original Sin, man's nature changed for the worse, for he departed considerably from perfect being. People can be virtuous by themselves, but this did not guarantee them salvation, because God, who created all souls simultaneously, ordained salvation in eternal life for some of them irrespective of their own efforts, and perdition for others. And that verdict did not become known until the final act of the drama performed by the Creator.

Augustine was convinced that man was unable to free himself from sin without God's grace. He could be saved through grace, a specific divine force which directed some unflinchingly towards goodness, while leaving others out in the cold. Augustine's idea to that effect was not accepted by his contemporaries. Not at once. Indeed, the question of free will and grace was one of the most acute in the doctrinal struggles of his time.

The sermons of Pelagius, a British monk and theologian whose name is a Greek rendering of the Celtic appellation Morgan, or sea-born, were highly popular in Rome, especially in aristocratic houses which had been only superficially Christianised. Pelagius gravitated more to philosophy than to Christian theology proper. He held that Adam alone was guilty of the Original Sin, and that no sin attached to his descendants. Consequently, there was no depravity in man's nature. Hence, the church was not

essential for man's salvation because the very need for salvation was placed in doubt.

Pelagius held that man had freedom of choice. He could by his will pick the road of virtue or vice. Baptism, Pelagius maintained, did not serve to atone for the Original Sin, but merely to initiate the believer in his community, which might eventually prompt him to do good.

Augustine wrote several dozen works against Pelagianism, for he was deeply occupied with the question of free will. But his was not purely a theological preoccupation. As a father of the church, Augustine was concerned about man's status vis-à-vis the church. He held that the individual should be unreservedly subordinate to organisation. And in Pelagianism he espied a menace to the church as an organisation. That is why he condemned it at ecumenical councils, and then also inspired certain punitive measures of church and state against Pelagianism.

The bishop of Hippo assumed that God made his preordained plan partly comprehensible to man through the Revelation, which provided a key to understanding the past and present, and slightly raised the curtain on the future. Hence, the meaning of history in general outline could be apprehended such as it was in the eternal plainness of God's Reason. Christian history was open to the future, which, however, was not infinite and had its limit: the Day of the Last Judgement.

Thus, the process of history was given an eschatological interpretation. So that any event in history, any human act, acquired true meaning only in relation to this future as predetermined by God. Acts and events became elements directed to the single goal of the stream of history, but at the same time forfeited their individual, concrete historical, meaning.

The eschatological approach, congruent with a prophetic interpretation of history, presupposed that events in history were temporal "signs" of concealed divine justice, realised in the historical future that grew over into a cosmic future. At the end of history, after the Last Judgement, when the Lord shall come again in glory, a handful of godly men preordained to salvation, would be endowed

with everlasting life. Such was the highly restricted, optimistic summing up of Augustine's providential conception, which reflected the metaphysical and limited nature of the religious notions of progress.

The holy history enclosed in the biblical canon and symbolically interpreted by Augustine, who was convinced that God spoke not only in words but also in events, had a strong continual influence on medieval thinking. It was thought to contain the prototypes of subsequent historical realities and current history. Quite peculiarly, it was given expression in the innovative theological concepts of Joachim of Flora, the heretic thinker of the 18th century, and also in the ideas of the impetuous philosopher of the 20th century, Teilhard de Chardin.

The prophetic charisma of medieval history had, on the other hand, often turned historicism into its opposite. This occurred when it attempted to explain the present, because the sense of all events had been reduced to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and the present turned out to be nothing but an unseasonable time in wait for Doomsday.

Medieval historians could easily find grounds for this approach in Augustine, who refused to see progress in the history of Rome or any other state, as did the Christian theologians Tertullian, Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea, all of whom sought to infuse with biblical notions the picture of history habitual for educated Romans. They believed that the history of Rome laid the ground for the advent of blissful times on the Earth. Augustine, on the other hand, though he was not foreign to a sort of Roman patriotism, conceived Roman history by and large as a chain of crimes and calamities. This would be enunciated still more strongly in the works of his disciple, Paulus Orosius, author of *Historia Adversus Paganos*, a treatise that became highly popular in the Middle Ages. Orosius, indeed, set out to write concrete history rather than a universal scheme of history.

Augustine assumed that the unity and universality of human history originated from the fact that all people were descended from Adam and consequently subject to

one and the same law. He, the writer of *De Civitate Dei*, had had to resort to a variety of crafty arguments to refute the existence of weird species of humans (one-eyed, with reversed feet, resting in the shade created by their raised legs, and so on).

Augustine, who maintained that miracles and seeming deviations from Nature and the providential order of things, were natural, believed that all men were equal before God and had a common fate in history. This idea, which had a biblical foundation, was highly relevant and progressive for its time, a time when barbarian peoples whom antique historians had denied "legitimacy in history", kept thrusting into world history more and more conclusively.

The divine plan of history, to Augustine's mind, did not come about overnight. It was gradual. He thought, therefore, that the process of history should be divided into several periods in accordance with their dependence on the culminating event, the Incarnation of Christ and the Six Days of the Creation conceived symbolically rather than literally. He went so far as to liken these periods to the ages of man, dividing history into seven parts: infancy, from Adam to Noah (ten generations); childhood, from Noah to Abraham (ten generations); adolescence, from Abraham to David; youth, from David to the Babylonian captivity; maturity and the beginning of the decline of life, from the Babylonian captivity to the birth of Christ; (the last three periods equalled forty generations each), and the final, sixth, period, from the preaching of the Gospel to the end of the world. This period, he held, might embrace as many generations as there were from the first Adam to the last.

It was a senescent (*senectens*) age, though it was also a time when the Earth produced a living soul, and Augustine's attitude to it was dual: it was a time of degradation, on the one hand, and a time of moral revival in preparation for the Last Judgement, on the other.

Yet these ages were crowned by the seventh day, a day when the Last Judgement would have put an end to time and history, ushering in the everlasting Kingdom of God.



It will not be amiss here to note that Augustine had step by step cast off the millenary idea (the idea of the thousand years Christ would reign on earth), though in the Middle Ages his concept was often thus interpreted.

Augustine was not the first to divide history into ages or eras. Similar attempts were made by antique writers. But their periods were essentially pessimistic. The Golden Age of mankind was for them always in the past, it had begun history, whereas history would culminate in the "worst" age. Augustine, too, was far removed from any radiant optimism. His description of the aging, senility and dying of his contemporary world was nothing if not terrifying. But that was natural, considering the extreme instability of his times. Yet he was obviously eager to divine some progress in the march of time. Each age of man was natural and necessary within the limits of his life. Each era was natural and necessary within the limits of history. It had value for itself, because it was organic and relevant for the materialisation of the heavenly plan, being one of the rungs in mankind's preparation for everlasting life, "when the pious would rise and throw off the remnants of the old being and become new".<sup>8</sup> This distinctive moral education was carried out to fit the various eras, each of which had its godly men to exalt it.

The division of history into eras struck deep root in the medieval mentality. The idea of religious progress, conceived, I think, not without Luther's influence, was reflected in Lessing, the eminent German 18th-century writer and thinker, who was attracted by the spiritual motivations of virtue and its rewards in the New Testament.

Augustine's philosophy of history was crowned by the concept of two cities, to the exposition of which he devoted his capital work, *De Civitate Dei*, which took him 14 years to write. The division of mankind into two species depending on their ethical characteristics appeared first in his treatise *De Vera Religione* and resembled in many ways the old-time rhetoric. Gradually, the notions of two types of people changed into general historical notions — a key to Augustine's concept of development, which he shifted from the plane of actual history into the sphere of

the existence and interaction of two cities: one of them earthly and the other the City of God, which differed in their supreme purpose, their aims and values. These cities were dissolved in historically empirical societies and scattered all over the earth.

When formulating his concept of two cities, Augustine fell back on biblical tradition, on the Old Testament prophesies of the Kingdom of God. It gained special meaning in the New Testament, which was oriented on awaiting that outcome. For a Christian, the best time is the time that has not yet come—in the future, in the Kingdom of God, where he would acquire the lost paradise. Augustine, it is true, took a step away from the interpretation given in the New Testament and projected God's Kingdom to the past as well, dating the foundation of the two cities not only to the inception of human history, but still farther back to the moment of the severance of the angels from God, to the beginning of good and evil, thereby giving them cosmic scale.

There was still another source that Augustine drew upon: the doctrine of Tychonius, a Donatist theoretician who thought it highly important to elucidate the eschatological nature of history and consequently divided humanity into two parts, two peoples. The "holy" people he identified with the church, and the others as being ruled by the devil.

Combating the Donatist heresy was one of Augustine's chief aims in life. In so doing, he favoured compulsion in matters of faith. Declaring that the truth "must make them (the Donatists—*Tr.*) shut their mouths", he relied not only on the word of God, but also inspired extensive persecution and punitive measures, which were taken by the church in close alliance with the state.

This gave the start to the medieval persecution of heretics, which rose to a crescendo in the Inquisition. Many Donatists were consigned to a painful death. But though Augustine's theory of compulsion vis-à-vis dissenters, their subjection and disciplining, was an important part of his evangelical strategy, in which political considerations often superseded the commandments of the Gospel,

this did not prevent the bishop of Hippo from elaborating upon his concept. He not only attacked his opponents, but did not shrink from borrowing and adapting their attractive ideas to his own ends. That was exactly what happened in respect of Tychonius' idea of two peoples.

Augustine did not immediately identify God's City with the church, nor the earthly city with the world at large. He portrayed them as two eschatologically oriented entities embodying the sacrament of divine predestination. There was no visible border line between the two cities. What was more, their inhabitants did not know what city they belonged to, for neither city was associated with any historical community. The founders of the two cities (in the sense of their earthly existence) were the two brothers Cain and Abel. The former originated the earthly city, and the latter the heavenly — a community that wandered about the Earth but did not belong to the Earth. Both cities coexisted in time (*saeculum*), which was the sole reality for the earthly city, and only an illusory reality for the heavenly city, reflecting its everlasting divine nature.

By this compromise of coexistence (of the two cities), whose sacramental significance was outlined in the Revelation (though leaving much beyond the comprehension of mortals), Augustine merged holy and earthly history, giving substance to their inevitable mutual influence and common manifestation in time as a dichotomically divided social and historical complex.

The earthly city consisted of people who wished to live "carnally", and the heavenly, of those who lived by the spirit. They "were created by two kinds of love: the earthly by a love of self carried even to the point of contempt for God, the heavenly city by a love of God carried even to the point of contempt for self."<sup>9</sup> Augustine's teaching of society ascribed importance to love, a notion that was equally relevant in antique philosophy and the Christian outlook, compounding it with a keen psychologism. For Augustine, love was a token of the divine cosmic power as the link between man and God the Creator. Yet human love was dual owing to the dualism of the soul and

flesh. The former bred a spiritual love, and the latter a carnal love. Both, Augustine held, could coexist in man for his own good, so that the love that brought about a state of bliss should increase with the decrease of the love that made people unhappy. True love, which imparted order to human existence in accordance with the divine arrangement of the universe, which led it in the right direction, was love for the Creator.

In the 12th century, Augustine's constructions about love would be interpreted with mystic exaltation by the initiator of the second crusade, Bernard of Clairvaux.

The two cities were a battlefield between good and evil, between the vain scramble for glory within oneself, and its final attainment in God. On earth and in every individual there ran a border line between the Kingdom of God and the abyss of evil. Man was the object, the centre and aim, of the struggle between the two cosmic powers. Not knowing the divine predestination in advance, man could distinguish himself in this universal battle between good and evil in the hope of reaching the Kingdom of God. "While this heavenly city," writes Augustine, "goes its way as a stranger on earth, it summons citizens from all peoples, and gathers an alien society of all languages, caring naught what difference may be in manners, laws and institutions by which earthly peace is gained or maintained, abolishing and destroying nothing of the sort, nay, rather preserving and following them (for however different they may be among different nations, they aim at one and the same end, earthly peace), provided that there is no hindrance to the religion that teaches the obligation to worship one most high and true God."<sup>10</sup>

This was Augustine's gift to the historians of medieval times. Now they could depict the histories of their peoples and their times as specific states in the consistent progress towards a single Christian destiny. He gave them a chance not to link the triumph of Christianity with the history of the Roman Empire (unlike his predecessors).

Augustine produced a panoramic vision of world history. He looked into the future, and shaped what was

a most important, a crucial, idea for the Middle Ages, that of belonging to a single Christian world, of a religious and spiritual community that reposed on the possible realisation of human hopes and aspirations in the Kingdom of Christ. What is more, he gave the final triumph of the City of God, that object of Christian hope, a transcendental character. The concrete condition of human society was, as it were, overshadowed by this eschatological reality that could be neither upset nor denied to man because Providence led to it as the supreme goal.

At different stages of medieval history the eschatological concept of the Christian hope, as put forward by Augustine, acquired a specific political meaning. It could be optimistic or pessimistic. It could be revolutionary in its thrust, and it could be conciliatory. Small wonder, therefore, that the more man began to feel himself not simply an actor but also a maker, the more the accents tended to shift in his understanding of Augustine's concept of two cities. Precedence was given to the thought barely plotted in Augustine's concept that the earthly society existed as a politically organised entity in order to secure the achievement of the highest human aspirations that coincided with the divine strivings. Thus, the Christian hope became a more earthly and effective thing.

Augustine did not identify the church and the City of God. Not all members of the church were genuine citizens of the City of God, for it was not given to man to fairly separate the grain from the chaff. Truly pious men as well as men who lived "carnally", could be found in the church. Augustine contrasted the church he knew, "peregrinating" in the earthly world and "limping along" (*clauda*), to the church of the future cleared of the godless who had joined it, of false Christians whose numbers exceeded those of the pious and whom he described as robbers. Still, it was clear to him that the church was not subject to censure or blasphemy. True, he himself did not always follow that rule, heaping charges of sinfulness on the "ungodly" of the church, and pointing to "stains and creases" in the visage of Christ's bride. While he rightly portrayed the church as an earthly institution tainted by

earthly vices, he worked upon the concept of a perfect church that was already in his time the nucleus of the earthly church and constituted its true essence. What he meant was the congregation of holies (*congregatio sanctorum*), to which, as Augustine saw it, belonged the Kingdom of God. There were pious men also in the world at large, outside the church, he held, and they joined the church after their resurrection.

Augustine's teaching on grace, which did not entirely fit in with his idea of free will, and his consequent doubts about the role of the church in the salvation of man, was a bone of contention for his commentators and followers. If salvation was preordained, what then was the role of the church in this world? The medieval theologians, especially those high up in the church hierarchy, usually brushed off this aspect of the Hippo bishop's doctrine, for it was liable to belittle the political role of the church, reducing it mainly to the role of a model ethical congregation. Augustine himself, too, often voiced conflicting and sometimes even mutually defeating points of view. This was a logical reflection of his inner development, and his inability to reconcile free will and predestination in the Christian framework, and, indeed, Christianity's moral principles and political ambitions.

Augustine, whose time was a time of keen doctrinal and political struggles within the church which strained to become the leading political force in the world, and who was himself an active and shrewd politician, was naturally a promoter of the claims of the church. He was the first who had in more ways than one substantiated the formula that the "Church is the Kingdom of God". Though he did not in so many words identify the church with the City of God, he could not avoid defining the place of the church above the world. Here was his train of thought: the union of the church as "Christ's body" or "Christ's bride" with God, thus redeeming mankind, was reason enough for it to be the "pillar and foundation" of the truth, because the truth of the Gospel was sustained by what was done and decided upon by the Catholic Church.

Augustine, who had so devoutly trusted God's grace, did not, however, hesitate to categorically express the conflicting idea that the church held a monopoly on absolution. Kind deeds, martyrdom and Christian endeavour, he noted, were senseless outside the church. Given this approach, the church became an all-powerful force whose will all should obey as that of God's vicar on earth. As Augustine saw it, Christ's Kingdom was not something belonging to a distant future; it had come, and its purpose was the spiritual resurrection, the second birth, of man, leading to the emergence of a community of saints who comprised the nucleus of the church. Regardless of Augustine's own intentions, his polysemous doctrine offered opportunities for theocratic conclusions, as abundantly confirmed by the history of the Catholic church.

As bishop, Augustine was a rigid guardian of orthodoxy and of the primacy of church authority. He traced the primacy of the church to the postulate that the earthly state belonged entirely to the earthly city and was the embodiment of sinfulness. Well known is his definition of the state as a band of robbers with "justice left out". (Ten centuries later, this thought would appear highly interesting to François Villon, one of the greatest of French lyricists.) In Augustine's opinion, the days of such a state were numbered, because God's curse lay on it. This released its subjects from serving it. (An idea that tended to revive during times of confusion and revolutionary turmoil.) The natural condition of a state was ceaseless war and "depredation". This went against Augustine's grain. He saw the highest earthly good in peace and tranquillity, more desirable and agreeable than other conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Peace on earth was attainable through order, social organisation, and discipline. Yet none of this could be had without a state. Here again, as in his interpretation of the church, Augustine came into conflict with himself, defining the state as a divine instrument for the attainment of peace. God, the wisest creator and just disburser of all creation, who had created the mortal breed of humans as the Earth's best adornment, granted men a benefit corresponding to their life, that is, earthly peace and everything

needed to secure it. And he who in his earthly life took advantage of the benefits that led to peace, would attain eternal peace in everlasting life, and he who did not, would acquire no peace on earth and also forfeit celestial peace. The peace of the state was an established consent of its citizens in relation to authority and obedience.<sup>13</sup>

In this connection, Augustine moderated his opinion of the rulers of earthly states. He had earlier likened them to robber chiefs, distinguishing between them only with respect to the scale of their wrongdoings. But now he urged people to pray for them, especially for the Christian emperors.

Subjects, he maintained, were obliged to serve the good rulers and to suffer the rule of the bad with Christian humility.

Augustine's attitude towards the state changed substantially within the limits of just one treatise, *De Civitate Dei*. In the end, as theologian and bishop, he arrived at the idea of the church and the state working hand in hand, for did they not wander about hand in hand in the earthly city. But in this alliance he ascribed to the state the subordinate role of servant of the heavenly city.

Augustine's time was the finale of an important era in human history. It stood for the end of the antique civilisation and the infancy of the new medieval society. It was a time of the first revolutionary turning in human history, a turning that was already making itself felt in society, the state, the minds, and the inner life of men, through the ongoing flux and a specific tension.

In the centre of the main currents of Christian tradition, Augustine focussed the ideological and cultural tendencies of his time by becoming the initiator of Christian historicism.

Augustine's doctrine of the process of history became an important part of medieval Christianity as the most general synthesis and the most general sanction of the feudal system. Hence the complexity and ambiguity of his own historical fate.



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## RETICENT HISTORIANS AND IMPASSIVE POETS

In the 6th book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Anchises, father of Aeneas, the Trojan prince who founded the Roman state, prophesied Rome's greatness and power.<sup>1</sup> He recounted its caesars, the heroes of its republican era, and described the reign and rule of Emperor Augustus. We would expect to see an unfolding of historic events. But nothing of the sort. What was to happen (and had in fact happened by Virgil's time) rises before us as something congealed in a magic crystal, an impregnation in the eternal rotation of universal life.

It was no accident that Virgil anteceded Anchises' historical prophesy with a brief excursus into the cosmogony of Plato and Pythagoras compounded with stoicism, acknowledging the timeless transmigration of souls, and asserting the original and final immutability of all subsistence.

Ovid, another great Roman poet who had in some aspects outdone even Virgil, also proved to be a devotee of the doctrine of timeless motion and timeless return. He applied it without reservations to the facts of history in his *Metamorphoses*. The approach was, indeed, common to poets who had ruled the minds of men in their day, but also to historians whose works were part of the study of rhetoric. The finest of Roman historians were as a rule writers who described what they had seen, known, or inherited. Some did not confine themselves to pure descrip-

tion. They ascended to analytic heights in a bid to demonstrate the causes of events or to predict their aftermaths. Often they commented on the morality of historical personages, peoples, or events. But none of them managed to rise to a truly *historical* conceptualisation. Nor did this detract from their merits or add to their demerits. The Roman (and, indeed, any antique) mind was simply incapable of seeing history as a process, as a development of events with its own culmination points and recessions, and a certain predictability of causes and effects. The Roman mind simply could not take the temporal principle seriously.

"The experience of universal statehood and centuries of power," writes Soviet philosopher A. F. Losev, "whether social or political, and finally that truly Roman sense of the unity of history that stretched from Aeneas of Troy to Emperor Augustus—on account of all this the Romans were not able to feel the singularity of history, and not able to sense that history in general and Roman history in particular, was unrepeatable. However fervently Rome admired its own social and political reality, it saw this reality as nothing but the result of the rotation of celestial bodies and the related succession of births and deaths, the endless transmigration of souls into new bodies. Here, at this most intimate point in Roman social aesthetics, we feel the antique frigidity and the anti-historical, pre-personalised and deathlike materialistic, though also mystical, concept of history known as the eternal return and repetition of the fate of human souls and the souls of peoples through the repeated and impersonal motion of frigid and, in general, blind celestial bodies" (A. F. Losev, *Graeco-Roman Aesthetics*, Moscow, 1979, in Russian, pp. 72-73).

Christianity had its own philosophy of history, distinct from that of the ancients. Indeed, history became one of the chief battlefields between paganism and Christianity. It would be a mistake to think, however, that Christian historiography was absolutely contrary to that of the ancients. It assimilated much of the latter's experience, though its complexion was different and new in the light

of a fundamentally different and new philosophy. Reposing on the Old and New Testaments, drawing on the heritage that went deep down to the ancient Judaic tradition with its keen appreciation of the individual and the temporal principle of being, Christian historiography produced new notions of time, new notions about the structure of the world, and about man's history and place in history. But it did so after having assimilated the classic models and the antique rules of narration. It tore down the antique view of rotary historical motion, and imparted to history linear motion from the Creation to Doomsday, thus giving it a beginning and an end. It was only beyond the limits of the history of the Earth as such that the subsistence of redeemed mankind was to become universalised by merging with the subsistence of the divine world.

Typically, all the events set forth in the Gospel were conceived by the followers of the new religion as profoundly historical. God the Son and His Mother, the prophets and the apostles, all had at one time lived on the Earth, not in a timeless space like the antique god. In substance, all biblical characters were actors in a drama that occurred in time, with each of them being not only bearer of an abstract quality and subject to the merciless fate of Antiquity, but above all a historical character with a will of his own and a specific individual fate.

In Christian terms, the life of every person was a tiny fragment of world history. Yet the ways of history were no more predictable than acts of God. None but God could encompass it and, consequently, none could know or determine its sense or purpose.

The fathers of the church undertook to divide history into distinct periods whose sense or purpose could be apprehended, if only in general outline. Augustine consummated these efforts by dividing history into six ages according to the six ages of man and the six days of the Creation. But neither the fathers of the church nor the Christian historians could completely reject the political conception of history. There was in Christian historiography a division of history into the Babylonian, Median,

Persian, Macedonian and Roman kingdoms, which was in substance political.

The Christian historians had had to inscribe the history known from the writings of their adversaries into the biblical scheme, including contemporaneous times, because that was the only way of making history an effective tool in furthering the new ideology and Christianity's political triumph. Small wonder that Christians asserted themselves most actively in this ideological field with strong antique traditions, seeking to include the history of Rome in the biblical canon and thereby reassert the verity of their creed.

Pagan society, aside from the proselytes in its midst, had practically no knowledge of biblical history. Nor could it have any interest in what it saw as marginal, sectarian and barbarian. Roman history had its own, indisputably great, historians — Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Many other Roman politicians and statesmen, too, filled their leisure by writing histories. This was accepted, commended, and encouraged. It was in this tradition that Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, one of the last champions of paganism, wrote his *Historia Romana*.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries beneath-the-surface developments in Christian literature laid the ground for the historiographic explosion of the 4th century. The celebrated Italian researcher, A. Momigliano, presumes that this explosion was precipitated by the Christian obsession of vanquishing the Roman Empire and ruling out any renewal of the persecution of the Christian church.

The Edict of Milan was issued in A. D. 313. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea, the biographer of Constantine the Great, was published at about the same time, and soon translated into Latin. Somewhere around A. D. 316 appeared the treatise of Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, which recounted the sad fate of those who had persecuted Christianity.

Eusebius wanted to show the history of divine Providence, which linked the Christian biblical history with that of the pagans as a history of the direct and indirect salvation of humanity. His history was the first truly universal

history. But he presented it as the history of the church, not the history of the world.

Subsequently, Christian historians, both of late antique times, and especially of the Middle Ages, accepted Eusebius' history as a model both as regards its general conception and its method of narration. Eusebius had departed from the rhetorical tradition. He referred to his own experience, to authentic documents, especially church documents. By so doing he created a new model for writing history, which interwove both church and lay history by including, or referring to, the evidence of contemporaries and to contemporary documents.

Eusebius and Lactantius, and other Christian historians, did their utmost to make biblical history look superior to pagan history. Eusebius gave the Christian chronology the appearance of universal, general history. But that was not the only genre in Christian historiography. There were chronicles, hagiographies (lives of saints), and the like.

The Christian philosophy of history attained its peak in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, which occupies a special place in medieval culture.

Another three most eminent Christian historians—Sulpicius Severus, Paulus Orosius, and Salvianus—were active at the end of the 4th and in the early half of the 5th century. Sulpicius Severus, a historian from Southern Gaul who had studied with the rhetoricians of Bordeaux, set forth and compared events recorded in the Bible in a rare spirit of criticism. His *Chronicle*, a resumé of world history, was imbued with a spirit of research. He tended to turn description into real history organically linking past events with those of his own time, keeping history abreast of the times, as it were.

Augustine's disciple, Paulus Orosius, who had fled from Spain to Northern Africa to escape a barbarian invasion (though in the long run he failed to escape the Vandals anyway), decided to carry out Augustine's philosophically elaborated plan of a world history. But unlike his tutor, Orosius was a man of sombre mould, the hard times in which he lived making his pessimism still more pro-

nounced. His *Historia Adversus Paganos* was sharply anti-pagan and anti-heretical. He depicted all events in a tragic and hopeless light. All earthly kingdoms, he held, were doomed to perdition. Even at times of prosperity, they had given man and mankind nothing good. Ascetically inclined, Orosius had many admirers in the Middle Ages, among them Gregory of Tours, the Frankish historian, Isidore of Seville, Bede Venerabilis, Otto of Freising, and John of Salisbury.

Salvianus' *De Gubernatione Dei*, which he wrote in the time between the conquest of Africa by the Vandals and the Hun invasion, is more anti-barbarian in tenor than anti-pagan. Salvianus also censures the sins of the Romans, and condemns the vices of his time.

In sum, the 4th and the early half of the 5th century was a prosperous time for the Christian philosophy of history, which reposed upon the foundation created by the Christian thinkers of preceding years who worked out the orthodox doctrine and instilled discipline in dogmatic thinking. This was the period when the Christians mounted a sustained offensive on the pagan outlook and, in particular, on pagan history.

Inspired by the political victories of their religion, the Christians turned from persecuted into persecutors, accusing paganism of all sins and blaming it for all vicissitudes.

Even in that early period when Christianity was only making its first steps as a state religion, history showed how closely welded it was with politics. Intolerance became the key feature of the Christian ideology and historiography. This was most strongly evident in the writings of Firmicus Maternus, a predecessor of the medieval Inquisitors, who had in the early 4th century called for the destruction of pagan temples and those who attended them, and for the final elimination of paganism.

Seeing this intolerance and spirit of revenge, it seems hard to explain the attitude of the pagan historians of that time, for no few 4th-century histories written by pagans or nominal Christians have come down to us. Despite the differences in standard, authenticity and talent, all of

them have one thing in common: they are not distinctly anti-Christian, most of them do not refer to Christianity at all, or, if they do, contain fairly liberal opinions. None of the pagan historians with the exception of Eunapius come to grips with the hostile religion, with people who sought to wipe out paganism, in open polemics. We might assume (like Momigliano) that the direct conflict between Christians and pagans did not occur at the level of "top-grade" traditional historiography. For all their aggressiveness, the Christians stuck to the types of historical writing they had adopted, while the pagans continued to till their own field. They wrote in their own, distinctive historical genres.

Most of the pagan histories of the 4th century were compilations and breviaries. A striving to simplify, to systematise, to produce a variety of "codes" that set forth their subject in popular and fairly complete form was a sign of the times, and not only as regards history. One gets the impression that educated people of those times were preoccupied "packaging" the intellectual and cultural legacy of preceding eras in a bid to preserve and compress the greatest possible variety and volume of knowledge.

Unconsciously, they seemed to feel the crucial changes that were in the air. This is visible in the historical writings of the time. As a rule, they dealt with the history of Rome and portrayed the Roman antiquities. The *Historia Tripartita*, a compilation in three parts of writings by different authors, was among the most influential. It opened with an introduction concerning the origins of the Romans and contained information taken from legends and earlier histories. Though this first part was thought by some to have been contributed later, in the 15th century, such ideas have been conclusively repudiated. The second part, *De Viris Illustribus*, contained the biographies of the Roman caesars and the more prominent politicians of the Roman republic and the adjacent states. The information here is neither successive nor exhaustive, leading to the thought that considerable cuts and deletions were made in the source material.



The third and most substantial part, *De Caesaribus*, was written by Sextus Aurelius Victor, a writer and eminent statesman (who had been ruler of Pannonia, and then prefect of Rome under Emperor Theodosius I). One of the distinguished "Africans" (like Tertullian, Augustine, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, etc.) who contributed conspicuously to the culture of the 3rd to 5th centuries, Victor was among the favourites of Emperor Julian the Apostate, who had even ordered a copper statue of him to be put up in his lifetime. Victor's treatise was not a mere compilation. It betrayed the political attitude, moral stance, and style of its writer. For Victor, Roman statehood was an unsurpassed ideal. Its principles were to be carried into effect by an enlightened Senate, which cared for the power and happiness of the Romans rather more than for its own benefit. His ideal, consonant with the mood of Symmachus and his associates, looks most attractive in ethical terms, but anachronistic and absolutely unviable, for by then the single Roman state practically ceased to exist, the barbarians were a stark threat in the West, and the upper strata were racked by religious and political discord, which created economic and social instability.

Aurelius Victor who, as his contemporaries attest, had many fine qualities, searched for a way out of the impasse, first of all in the sphere of morals. He called attention to the ethical aspect of the deeds of the Roman emperors, striving to find something good in even the worst of them, something that had helped strengthen Rome, while censuring even those for whom he had the greatest liking for any immoral acts or contempt for the public welfare.

But the historian's idealised notions were reduced to nought by the monstrous facts of Rome's true history. Aurelius Victor, to be fair, did not try to shift the blame for the ills that had befallen Rome on the Christians. With genuine Roman pride, he blamed the pagan leaders for the decline of Roman power. Victor's treatise, which abounds in facts, became a rich source of information for later historians. It was used extensively by Jerome, a father of the church, and by Paul the Deacon, historian of

the Lombards, in the 9th century, and Lois of Ferrara in the 10th, and in the 12th by Gottfried of Viterbo and Henry of Huntington.

At the end of the 16th century, the *Historia Tripartita* was published in Antwerp, and found readers all over Europe even in modern times. Victor's description of the Roman emperors had, indeed, served as one of the sources for Alexander Pushkin's celebrated "Egyptian Nights", a poetic version of the tragic tale of Antonio and Cleopatra.

In the latter half of the 360s and in the 370s, Eutropius, a Roman historian, wrote a compendium stretching from the legendary building of Rome to the times of Emperor Valens (364-378). Eutropius did not apply to a wide variety of sources. He confined himself mainly to the evidence of Livy and Suetonius, and completed his narrative with an account of current events.

Compared with the writings of Aurelius Victor, the *Breviarium* of Eutropius was a more workmanlike and political history. The author wrote it for a specific circle of people, notably those who were associated with running the empire and with the civil service.

Basing his narrative on the reigns of successive emperors, Eutropius set out to demonstrate models of exemplary service, military victories, and the power of Rome. He hoped that examples of a constructive and positive kind would teach people to combat and overcome the difficulties that were facing the empire in his time. He attached little or no importance to the ongoing religious turmoil. A senior administrator himself, he named the decline in discipline, the wilful behaviour of the legionnaires, and the absence of the requisite organisation, as the chief reasons for Rome's declining power. But Eutropius did not shrink from details and vignettes that enlivened his narration. He was pleased to pass on political anecdotes. All this won him a grateful readership in the centuries to come. His *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita* was widely circulated not only in Western Europe, but also in the Byzantine Empire (where it was translated into Greek).

One more historical compendium, the *Breviarium Festi*,

appeared in the 4th century. It was fairly popular in the Middle Ages, though Eutropius' history was far superior in quality. The *Breviarium Festi* was an account of the reign of Emperor Valens, and was obviously written by a witness of the events. This breviary, too, displayed complete indifference to questions of religion.

Some historians hold that the *Historiae Augustae Scriptores* was inspired by the pagan party of Symmachus. It was produced by six writers and covered the period from A. D. 117 to 284. Though it betrayed a certain reliance on Suetonius, the choice of material was distinctly tendentious: it favoured those emperors who reckoned with the Senate, and denounced those who betrayed despotic tendencies. The *Historiae Augustae* also betrayed a veiled anti-Christian sentiment.

Ammianus Marcellinus occupied a special place among the historians of the 4th century. In that era of compendia and breviaries, he produced a work that would not shame a Livy or a Tacitus. His *Res Gesta* towers above everything else written in his time. He wrote his treatise, as he put it, "as a soldier and a Greek".<sup>2</sup> Born in Antioch, he became a Latin writer who attained undisputable proficiency in a language that had at first been foreign to him (though, admittedly, his writings are far removed from the finest samples of classical Latin). As a young man, Ammianus became an officer in the Roman army. The 20-year-old Greek fought under the banner of Ursicinus, a well-known general, and later accompanied the future Emperor Julian in his victorious battles against the Alemanni. That was when he attained a degree of friendship with that future champion of paganism, and remained loyal to him until the end of his days. For Ammianus, Julian was a model of emperor and man. In 363, he took part in Emperor Julian's campaign against the Persians. And it was the death of Julian, whom he mourned most deeply and sincerely, that put an end to Ammianus' army career. At first, he went home to Antioch, then travelled extensively. And the knowledge he gathered during his travels was successfully inscribed in his history.

In the early 380s Ammianus settled in Rome, sharing

all the distressing burdens heaped on foreign settlers in that city. Here he set about writing his *magnum opus*, in which he probed with insight, accuracy and dedication into the essence of the events that marked his turbulent and difficult times. Ammianus' history is a keenly topical study, for its author was not only witness or participant in the events, but also strove to determine the causes of the developments. The last eighteen volumes of his History are extant, covering the years 353 to 378, but there is reliable evidence that in the missing volumes he had looked into events that began with the reign of Nerva (A. D. 96 to 98).

The labours of Ammianus Marcellinus were commended by the pagans in Rome. He read his History in the home of Symmachus. And Libanius, a historian resident in Antioch, wrote in a letter to Ammianus that Rome's acclaim of his history was a worthy reward for his labours.

Ammianus Marcellinus, a Greek, wrote his history in Latin and in tribute to the glory of Rome, a city which would, as he put it, survive as long as humanity existed.<sup>3</sup> He elaborated upon the concept of Eternal Rome popular with the pagan nobility. For him Rome's providential mission was indissolubly linked with imperial power. The ideal emperor, as he saw it, should possess a set of virtues in order to use the preordained twists of fate to the best advantage. The emperor personified Roman statehood. He was the champion and protector of his subjects and concerned himself tirelessly with the welfare of his realm. He should avoid being a tyrant, and was obliged to be strong and demanding, a moral example for his subjects who avoided excesses of all kinds, and showed his kindness.<sup>4</sup>

In politics and life, Ammianus valued reason and intelligence above all else. "How powerless is brute force against reason," he exclaimed.<sup>5</sup> Besides, reason also inspired high moral qualities. And Ammianus saw Emperor Julian, a martial hero and a philosopher, as a blend of reason and lofty ethics. While the Christians portrayed Julian as an apostate, monster and a devil incarnate, who had set out to restore paganism, the historian endeavoured

red to show the grandeur and what he thought was the true sense of the doings of that enthroned philosopher.

He was perfectly well aware of the abyss between his picture of the ideal Roman state and the brutal realities of its history. His works abounded in fervent exposures, including exposures of rulers of the empire, of the blue-blooded Roman nobility and their depravity.

Recalling what Cicero wrote on this score, Ammianus commented harshly: "Nothing is good enough for them in this world except that which yields profit, and they treat friends as they would animals, liking those more from whom they expect some benefit."<sup>6</sup> But Ammianus Marcellinus also censured the indolent and reluctant plebs, and the ignorant mob.

He mourned the decline of culture, and saw education as a powerful means of improving matters, of elevating inherently foolish characters.<sup>7</sup>

His attitude towards Christianity was evidence of the then typical pagan religious tolerance. He noted the integrity and plainness of Christianity, and the high moral qualities of the early Christians. But he also pointed out the negative sides of the contemporary church, the rapacious greed and depravity of the ecclesiastics, and especially the prelates. He believed that the state of Rome should afford freedom of worship to all religions. Faith, in his view, had to be sincere. It was an element of culture and led to moral improvement. True religion, he noted, had nothing in common with superstition and was foreign to any persecution of those who worshipped other gods.

The writings of Ammianus Marcellinus were not known in the Middle Ages. It was not until Poggio Bracciolini, papal secretary, humanist and subsequently chancellor of Florence, discovered his history in the abbey of Fulda in the 15th century that the educated class first gained access to that Latin classic. In the 16th century, Sigismund Helenius, a Czech humanist, published the last great Roman historian's classic in Basel.

The 4th-century panegyrics, which belonged to the domain of rhetoric rather than historiography as such, served as peculiar source material for medieval historians.

They were a long-time official variety of Latin eloquence, a traditional element in official festivities and ceremonies, and a peculiar test of a rhetorician's merits. Great orators and writers, including Cicero, the greatest of them, did not spurn panegyrics, and one can hardly agree with the more than destructive view of the late 19th-century historians, who censured the panegyrists. Their comment was unhistorical, because to say that panegyrics were nothing but a legalised form of flattering emperors and the powerful men of those days was to say nothing, or to say what was more than obvious to contemporaries of the panegyrists.

Panegyrics were an indissoluble part of the political and rhetorical practices hallowed by tradition. They were, indeed, a part of the imperial etiquette. No festive occasion was complete without a panegyric. And emperors often selected their own panegyrists from among the more brilliant rhetoricians. Panegyrics extolled the greatness of the empire as personified by its ruler. And in this the imperial court set an example for the provincial administrations, which also lusted for their share of praise. In the 4th century, panegyrics were widespread. They were written in verse and in prose. The poems of Claudian eulogising Emperor Honorius and the Roman general Stilicho could be taken as models of versified panegyrics.

Not many panegyrics written in prose are extant. The collection belonging to the rhetoricians of the Gaulish city of Autun may be considered a "classic". It consists of twelve panegyrics, only one of which belonged to the pen of Pliny the Younger and eulogised Emperor Trajan, while all the others were dedicated to 4th-century emperors. While Rome and Italy became increasingly barbarised, various provincial schools, notably those in Gaul, continued to maintain a high standard of teaching rhetoric for still a long time. One of the finest Latin panegyrists of the late 5th and early 6th centuries, Magnus Felix Ennodius, was, indeed, of Gaulish origin.

The panegyrists and their audience saw nothing reprehensible in that practice. Emperor Julian, philosopher and writer that he was, had also written panegyrics. If

poets had licence to lie, he observed, then orators had licence to flatter, adding that it was not wrongful of them to extol someone deserving of praise. True, panegyrists only discharged official orders. In his panegyric to Emperor Constantine, Nazarius said in so many words, that orators were not allowed to have their own opinion of their lords. Panegyrists declaimed what the state wanted to hear.

It is therefore doubly important for us to note that all extant official 4th-century panegyrics made no mention whatever of Christianity. They were modelled on the traditional rhetorical culture of those days, and abounded in clichés and stereotypes. And, it appears, the rulers who were accustomed to that sort of eloquence, were not in the least shocked by the fact that in panegyrics they might be likened to pagan gods. This was a usual figure of speech, a poetic allegory. Besides, though Christianity had been adopted then as the official religion, the emperors did not object to being deified. Temples were erected even under Constantine in honour of the reigning emperor as edifices in which nothing short of divine worship was practised in his honour. Statues of the ruler were for a long time still objects of worship, and all elements of court ritual emphasised the emperor's divine origin.

Still, the 4th-century Christian emperors listed championing their religion, their alliance with the Christian church, among their chief merits. The panegyrists, on the other hand, who inflated the least creditable traits of the emperors out of all proportion, made no mention of their concern for Christianity, though they did portray the emperor a favourite of heaven who was treated with grace by the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. The panegyrists mentioned the father of the gods, the supreme lord, but this could apply equally to the supreme pagan god and the Christian God. Certainly, 4th-century paganism had long since departed from the initial myths. In substance, it sought to create a new philosophical mythology upon the basis of the old. This was especially true of Neoplatonism. The paganism of the educated gravitated towards a specific form of monotheism. But this did not make it any the less an antipode of Christianity.

The panegyrists made frequent use of the word *divinitas*, which denoted many things, yet evaded any final definition. This, too, leads to the assumption that the persistent silence that enveloped Christianity in the official panegyrics was also a form of pagan opposition to the all-conquering Christianity and, perhaps, a plea by omission for the peaceful coexistence of the two religions.

For the Romans, history was not only a record of past glory, but also a source of wisdom. Here it shared laurels with poetry. Homer's epic and the history of Rome were for the Romans a sort of historico-poetic alloy. Certainly, in the 4th century their attitude to Homer and poetry was not entirely the same as in Virgil's time. Bedevilled by endless wars, living in constant dread of barbarian invasion, and tired of religious discord, people hearkened with far less enthusiasm to poetic accounts of bygone or invented events. Still, though culture had declined and barbarian influences were distinctly felt, and though interest in the verse of Homer had diminished, especially because those in the West who knew Greek had dwindled in number, the distant events of the Trojan War still held a certain appeal for people who sought distraction from the hardships of the times, on the one hand, and certain models of morality, on the other, the latter being especially important to those who were either inimical or indifferent to Christianity. (To be sure, a few centuries later Alcuin, an English scholar who assisted Charlemagne in securing a revival of learning at the court of the Franks, will complain that his students were far more interested in the adventures of the antique heroes than the passions of Christ.) Romans knew of the Trojan War from the *Latin Iliad*, an abridged version of Homer's epic produced in the 1st century A.D.

A new piece of the Trojan cycle appeared in the 4th century. It was a diary of the Trojan War (*Ephemerie Belli Trojani*) ascribed to the pen of Dictys the Cretan, translated from the Greek by Lucius Septimius. On the face of it, Septimius resorted to a fairly widespread literary ploy, passing himself off as nothing more than the translator of an old Greek manuscript. He claimed that it



belonged to the pen of a participant in the Trojan War, a man named Dictys, son of the legendary Deucalion. That this is a dissimulation is suggested by the fact that Dictys is not mentioned by Homer among his characters. The story of how the manuscript was found, involving Cretan shepherds, and Emperor Nero of all people, seemed no less astonishing and unreal.

But an authentic fragment of Dictys' diary, dating to the borderline of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. and recorded in an Egyptian scroll, was found in 1907, upsetting speculation. It was consequently clear that the Latin version of the conquest of Ilion (Troy) had a non-Homeric Greek source distinct from the *Iliad*, which, to be sure, was not at all unexpected. The authenticity of the Homeric version had been challenged, as we know, even in antique times. The name of Zoilus, the first of Homer's critics, has indeed become proverbial.

The diaries of Lucius Septimius gained a wide circulation, but it was Dares the Phrygian who was destined to become Homer's rival in the Middle Ages. His *History of the Sack of Troy* (*De Excidio Trojae Historia*) which was a fairly poor translation into barbarous Latin of a Greek treatise dating to the 2nd or 3rd centuries, appeared at the end of the 5th century. Traces of its Greek version may be found in the works of John Malala, John Zez and Isaac Porphyrogenet.

The preface emphasised that this *History* was by a witness and participant, and was therefore truthful, whereas Homer's poem, written a few hundred years later, abounded in conjectures and departures from the facts. And it was true that in some details the *History* may have looked more credible. But that was not proof of its authenticity. The famous Trojan Horse, for example, was described in it as nothing more than a replica of a horse's head above the gate to Ilion.

Still, the influence that Dares' *History* and the often attached treatise of Dictys had in the Middle Ages, was tremendous. Isidore of Seville, for one thing, who was the first encyclopaedist of the Middle Ages, put Dares as a historian on a par with the biblical Moses. In the 12th

century interest in Dares' *History* erupted with fresh force. The *History of the Sack of Troy* was retold or used by the writer Gottfried of Viterbo, and by Guido delle Colonne, a Sicilian poet who wrote the famous *Historia Troiana*, the French poet Simon Aurea Carpa, and the English poet Balderic de Bourgueil. And at the court of Henry II (Plantagenet), people avidly read Joseph of Exeter's poem, *De Bello Troiano*, in which its author referred to Dares.

A long-winded French version, *Roman de Troie*, appeared in the middle of the 12th century, and was used by Guido delle Colonne for his Latin version, which was eventually translated into Italian, French, German, English, Hungarian, South Slavic, and Russian. It is most remarkable that Dares' history served as the source for several magnificent works. In the foreground of Dares' tale are not the exploits of Achilles and Aeneas, but the adventures of prince Troilus, who was Hector's brother and who was said to have fallen in love with the lovely Briseis of Troy (in Homer she was the concubine of Achilles). Boccaccio, indeed, followed Dares' and not Homer's version in his poem, *Il Filostrato*. Chaucer, too, used the plot in his poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the portrayals in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and Ronsard's *La Frañçiade* are also traceable to Dares. In sum, that fairly mediocre 5th-century history had been astonishingly successful and its influence on the literature of later ages incredibly strong.

Alexander the Great was a favourite character in European and Oriental writings of the Middle Ages. Not only histories but also novels were written about him in the Greek language. Some were traceable to the treatise ascribed to Callisthenes, a relative of Aristotle's. The history of Pseudo-Callisthenes spread widely in the Latin-speaking world in the 4th and 5th centuries, and started a period in which a diversity of medieval works on Alexander the Great were published. In the 12th century, in the heyday of knightly literature, Gautier de Châtillon wrote a magnificent 10-volume epic on Alexander in Latin, and at about the same time, Nizami, the great East-

ern poet, produced his *Iskander-nameh* (The Book of Alexander). The heroic character of Alexander the Great excited the imagination of people in the East as well as the West. The popularity of the Macedon general spread far and wide, and people in medieval Russia, too, read eagerly about his exploits.

Not only the works of Livy, Suetonius and Sallust, but also the histories of the Last of the Romans visibly influenced the culture of the later eras. Historical breviaries of bygone days went into the histories written in the Middle Ages. They also provided plots for works of fiction. Fantasies about the sack of Troy or about Alexander the Great, though not truly historical, provided food for thought not only to educated people, but also to other estates in Europe, influencing literature right up to the end of the Renaissance.

From the treatises of 4th- and 5th-century pagan authors, historians of the next millennium also borrowed the methods of writing history. For the masterpieces of Latin historical prose were beyond the reach of most people. The principles of systematising material, the manner of presenting it, the interest in eye-witness accounts and inclusion of documents in the presentation of history — all these elements were largely taken from the traditions of that age.

Another important point: the historical treatises written by pagans contained numerous moral and ethical examples that had no root in Christianity. Fair to their ideological opponents, they offered a lesson in religious tolerance to later generations (though, admittedly, these latter failed to benefit from it). The didactic examples were, however, well used in medieval schools and universities, and filtered into the literature of those times. Historical anecdotes, a blend of true history and fabrication, were in wide circulation. The 4th- and 5th-century historians passed the baton to Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, who produced encyclopaedic compendia that were highly popular in medieval times and instrumental, as was thought at the time, in linking the different eras.

The clash between Christianity and paganism in the 4th and 5th centuries was peculiar. The offensive mounted by the Christian historians failed to elicit a direct response from pagan authors, who continued writing in the traditional vein, eager to pick up the Roman historical heritage. To counter the onslaught of the Christians, the Last of the Romans showed patience and, in effect, a practically total absence of counter-criticism.

Was this an admission of defeat or a sign of moral tenacity? Or, perhaps, a token of hope for the future? It is very difficult to reply to these questions with any degree of certainty. But the survival of their legacy in the Middle Ages showed that they had, consciously or not, shown rare wisdom. The theologised Christian histories, indeed, failed to oust the pagan tradition. While the universal philosophy of history was Christian, practical historiography, the political and military history of the West European medievalism, followed largely in the footsteps of the Roman historians.

Time showed that as far as history was concerned there had been no defeated side in the battle of ideas.

Today's readers take it for granted that literature must in one way or another reflect the epoch in which it is written. In that respect, however, the literature of the 4th and 5th centuries is likely to bewilder us. Those times abounded in tragic events. The Roman Empire was declining steadily. The barbarian world was in the act of taking over. But these radical changes did not, so it appears at first glance, trouble the writers and poets, who only rarely mentioned barbarian names and only rarely complained, as Apollinaris Sidonius did, about the boorish nature and hard drinking of the Alemanni.

The Roman Empire was the arena of a bitter struggle between paganism and Christianity. The new religion emerged triumphant. Yet the poets, and not only pagan poets but also Christian ones, continued to extol pagan gods and refer to characters from the antique mythology. Now and then, it is true, a Christian poet would turn his back on the habitual plots and genres, and set about glori-

fying the Christian God and personages from the Bible. Looking around, they did not see the new elements, however, and only features of the old or, more precisely, the eternal — the Eternal City, the eternal myth, the eternal everyday life.

The ancients were accustomed to thinking in terms of a timeless and unchanging world, of a self-sustaining economic fabric, of timeless ethical and aesthetic values. They wanted their poetry to assert that sort of world. That is why the private life described in epigrams was habitually cosy, and the life of the State described in panegyrics was habitually magnificent — although at times an epigram would refer to a temple being torn down to build walls or a panegyric to a hero with a Germanic name.

Some Christian writers, however, ventured to devote their lives to serving the new faith, as did Paulinus in his reply to the letters of Ausonius. But those two swore fealty to the City of God in the same rhetorical terms as their predecessors did to the earthly city.

It will be only fair to note, however, that the poetry of those days was marked by a distinct lack of religious deference. This may be illustrated by the centos of those days, which were patchwork poems composed wholly of lines or stanzas taken from other poets. Thus were poems produced on subjects totally foreign to the works from which the fragments were borrowed. Lines from pagan poets who knew nothing about the Bible and could not have written about it, were used in renderings from the Bible and poems on Christian subjects. Quotations taken out of context and given entirely different associations, ceased to have an independent meaning, their verbal images fell apart and gained an entirely new semantics.

Pagan rhetoric had taken captive Christian literature and poetry. Apollinaris Sidonius, a Christian prelate, for example, composed poems which were wholly pagan in form, imagery, and vision. Even the verses of Pope Damasus I, who won favour for the poetic inscriptions he made on the tombs of martyrs, were rhetoric in style and texture. The 4th century was still far removed from the categorical imperative issued by Pope Gregory the Great,

"It does not become the same lips to utter praise of Christ and praise of Jupiter."<sup>8</sup>

Against the background of numerous nameless and mostly inept poets there were a few — pagans or men indifferent to the question of faith — who left a visible trace in the literature of their time and influenced the culture of later ages.

The first of these in time was Decimus Magnus Ausonius, a man of good fortune and a long life (c. 310—c. 394). Born in Aquitaine, he made a brilliant career. The rhetorician from Bordeaux became the quaestor of the holy palace, which was one of the highest offices in the state. He was entrusted with the education of Gratian, son and heir apparent of Emperor Valentinian. When his charge donned the purple in A. D. 375, the emperor's favours were showered on Ausonius' whole family. All male relatives were made governors of the largest provinces of the Western Empire. At 70, Ausonius was made consul; this was a high post, though it was by then stripped of almost all its political muscle. Thereupon, grateful for his good fortune, Ausonius withdrew to his Gaulish estates, fully satisfied with the life he had lived (which is in itself an exceedingly rare thing) and the things he had accomplished, and the rewards he had received.

Ausonius was clever. He had a sharp eye for intrigues, but was also equable and good-humoured. Though he was concerned over what exactly he would leave posterity to remember him by (which is why in his poetry he spoke of himself, his family, teachers, and friends at such great length), he was a dilettante versifier, but treated poetry with reverence and respect. He was a friend of Symmachus, chief of the pagan party, and a teacher of St. Paulinus of Nola, who eventually gave his riches to the poor and led a hermitlike life. Ausonius was never able to understand how his brilliant pupil could reject the beautiful Muses who presided over the arts, and how he could devote himself exclusively to monastic service so far removed from poetry and the joys of life.

The teacher appealed to the classical examples of friendship, those of Euryalus and Nisus, and of Orestes

and Pylades. Finally, hurt by Paulinus' reluctance to respond to his pleas, he damned him: wishing that no joy should ever warm his heart, no tender elegies ever delight his ear, and no man ever comfort him as he wandered lonely in the Alpine foothills consumed with grief. It was the curse of a pagan, who could not comprehend the striving of a Christian thirsting to devote himself to serving God and to withdraw from the world, thus earning the everlasting reward for his austere and solitary life. Paulinus had never returned to his teacher. He became bishop of Nola and wrote religious poetry.

The lack of understanding between Ausonius and Paulinus was something that transcended mere differences in outlook. It was an example of the conflict between antique paganism and the burgeoning medievalism shot through with the spirit of Christianity, conflict that was irreconcilable.

Still, Ausonius was foreign to any strained rejection of Christianity, as he was, indeed, to any ardent or passionate visions of the world. The happy lot he had had, rare for a poet, and his easy-going nature, like the peculiar quality of his poetic gift, have resulted in poetry that is still regarded as irreproachable in finish and beauty. Ausonius was a brilliant rhetorician, and his verse was flesh of the flesh of the pagan rhetoric culture. Yet unlike any other poet of his time Ausonius was eager to speak of himself, of the towns of the empire, of the school, and of nature — and he did so in great detail, with particulars that were taken from life rather than rhetoric. These qualities made his writing attractive not only to lovers of poetry, but also to historians, who appreciated them as a source of information about the life and manners of those remote days.

Ausonius had no understanding for the new religion. Nor did he ever bother to see what it amounted to. Revealing in that respect is his verse about the figure three. (It will not be amiss to recall here that the times were marked by bitter, even murderous, debates about the relationship of the persons of the Christian Trinity.) Ausonius informed us in the foreword to the poem that he

wrote it during a break between "drinking and drinking", and added that it was better to read it when one was "in a good humour and slightly under the effects of wine". Ausonius listed everything that people knew about threes and nines, and turned to mythological and old rhetoric subjects, calling upon Hecate, queen of all witches and dealer in sorcery, who combined three creatures—goddess of the Earth, the Moon, and the infernal regions; the three-faced Diana, the three Charites or the Latin Graces, the Sirens who were three sister nymphs, and the Muses, nine in number... Highly symbolic, however, was the climax of the poem, which called on everyone to drink thrice, for there were three subsistences in the one substance of God. Ausonius found nothing more than this to eulogise the Trinity.

The ever fortunate Ausonius also had a highly fortunate posthumous fate. His poetry was not forgotten. The Spanish knew and appreciated him in the 7th century, for we find quotations of him in Isidore of Seville and that great lover of ancient poetry, Eugene of Toledo. At the time of the Carolingians, Walafrid Strabo paid tribute to the gifts of Ausonius, and even John of Salisbury and Walter Map of the enlightened 12th century displayed an interest in him. Ausonius' epigrams were appreciated by the Humanists. The first printed edition of Ausonius appeared in Venice in 1472.

Especially well known was Ausonius' poem, *Mosella*, which recounted the poet's travels along that tributary of the Rhine. It was, indeed, one of the finest descriptions of Nature in West European literature, for which reason it was popular with the German 19th-century romantics. Its *motifs* are echoed in Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest*, and Samuel Richardson, celebrated author of *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, widely read in the latter 18th and early 19th centuries, was also known to be under its spell.

Ausonius died in 394. And the Muses of Poetry at once elected a new favourite—the professional poet Claudian at the court of Emperor Honorius. Posterity rightly described his works as a blend of Ovid's elegance, Virgil's



thrust, and Lucan's brilliant rhetoric. Claudian wrote versified panegyrics abounding in allegories, references to mythology, and magnificent geographic descriptions. In a way, they were models of this type of writing. In later days, he was imitated by the panegyrists of the Renaissance, of the baroque period, and the Classicists. He extolled the virtues of General Stilicho, the actual ruler of the Western Empire in Emperor Honorius' time, as vividly and temperamentally as he passionately heaped hyperbolised accusations upon his enemies, notably Rufinus, his rival at the imperial court.

Of special interest is Claudian's poem, *The Abduction of Proserpina*, in which we hear strains of Orphic motives and the Neoplatonist conception of the cosmos. By poet Claudian's magic, the well-known myth about Ceres, the beneficent spirit of growth in grain and other vegetation, and her daughter Proserpina, abducted and raped by Pluto, god of the lower world, turned into a poetic depiction of the cosmos in which Proserpina's handiwork was the beginning of all things. With it, she turned the primordial chaos into harmonious Nature. But, sadly, Proserpina had had to go into the darkness of the lower world as befitted the wife of Pluto.

Claudian wrote many other poems close in spirit to European Mannerism, such as the one on crystal. But his life was short. He is thought to have died soon after his marriage, probably in 404, acclaimed by his contemporaries and the imperial court. A statue of Claudian was installed on the Capitoline.

Claudian the poet lived in a hyperbolised world, striving to reduce opposites to harmony. It was a vivid world gravitating towards the unusual or, in short, an antique mythologised world. It was only natural, therefore, that Claudian was among the first to be recalled when interest awakened in the antique culture. Quotations from his works may be found in writings of the 7th to 10th centuries. But it was not until the 12th century that his poetry was truly recognised, when Alain de Lille, French philosopher, theologian and alchemist, wrote his widely known encyclopaedic poem, *Anticlaudianus*, a treatise on morals

in which he was at once Claudian's pupil and antagonist. In that philosophical epic, Nature, reminiscent of the divine needleworker Proserpina, emerged triumphant over the Vices with the help of allegorical Virtues. Nature also created the perfect Human. Here we get a foretaste of the Renaissance, while all Christian strains are relegated to the background. Through Alain de Lille, Claudian influenced Dante Alighieri, and in modern times also Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*. Claudian's poetry attracted the attention of the philosophers of Chartres, in particular that of Bernard Sylvestris. Claudian was also well known at the court of Henry II (Plantagenet); notably by Walter Map, that Welsh ecclesiastic, scholar, and wit, and Joseph of Exeter, English ecclesiastic and Latin poet.

Claudian's *Abduction of Proserpina* and his panegyric to the sixth consulship of Honorius were included in the so-called *Libri Catoniani*, which became a schoolbook. But the author of *The Battle of the Seven Liberal Arts*, a poem popular in the 13th century, lamented that schools and universities had consigned to oblivion the finest books of Antiquity, those of Persius and Claudian. The latter was known to Petrarch and Chaucer, had influenced Politian, the Italian humanist, and won the deep affection of the poets of the baroque period.

Claudian was a Roman patriot. He never tired of eulogising the goddess of Rome. No less gifted, however, were the eulogies dedicated to Rome and its goddess by Rutilius Namatianus. A patrician, he was also a prefect of Rome. Full of contempt for anything un-Roman, he scorned Judeans and Christians, and denounced monks who had withdrawn from the world for being enemies of life and beauty. The poet was witness to painful events: for the first time in 800 years Rome was seized by an enemy in A. D. 410. The barbarian Goths devastated Rutilius' own estate in Southern Gaul. In 416 all pagans were dismissed from the civil service. Christianity's victory became final. This was evidently the reason why Rutilius abandoned Rome that year and withdrew to his estate in Gaul. He departed from Rome with grief, kissing its gates and weeping beneath its walls.

The poet described his unhappy return to Gaul in a meditative poem, *De Reditu Suo*, of which about 700 lines are extant. Though he had witnessed the tragedy that befell Rome, the city rises in his verse as a great, eternal, and unshakeable fortress, the crown and torch-bearer whose worldwide glory was timeless. The eternal Sun, he wrote, was more easily forgotten than the glory and honour that was Rome.

The Middle Ages did not know of Rutilius Namatianus. His writings were buried in the tranquil seclusion of a monastic library, until finally discovered in the late 15th century by Jacopo Sannazaro, an Italian poet, who was shaken by them, and copied them at once in his own hand rather than entrust the job to a scribe.

The works of Flavius Avianus, of whom little has come down to us, go back to the early 5th century A. D. He is known as a writer of fables who had put into Latin the tales of Babrius, the celebrated Greek poet of the 1st or 2nd century B. C. The fables of Avianus were dedicated to a Theodosius, probably Theodosius Macrobius who had written the *Saturnalia (Conviviorum Saturnaliorum)* and the *Commentarius ex Cicerone in Somnium Scipionis*. The fables of Avianus were pleasurably studied in medieval schools. At the turn of the 11th into the 12th century, a versified revision of the fables, the *New Avianus*, appeared by a "poet from Aosta" and still another by Alexander of Neccam about a century later.

How strong the pagan tradition still was in poetry was borne out by the writings of Apollinaris Sidonius (c. 430-480), who was consecrated bishop of Clermont. But that did not make him a devout Christian. His turbulent life was a vivid example of the turbulent and irreversible changes that Roman society was going through in the 5th century. In his time, Western Gaul had already become Visigoth and Eastern Gaul was Burgundian, a kingdom founded by a people who had fled from Germany in the early 5th century. The famous schools of rhetoric in the towns of Southern Gaul were being closed down. The homes of magnates were rebuilt into castles. The numbers of learned men continued to shrink. Hatred kept mount-

ing between the nobility of the empire and the mass of the people. Puppet emperors followed each other in quick succession.

Apollinaris Sidonius had barely time enough to write panegyrics in their honour. In A. D. 456 he composed a panegyric to his father-in-law Marcus Avitus, a Gaulish rhetorician, whom fate had put on the throne of the caesars for a few months. As a reward, a statue of the poet was unveiled in Rome. Soon, however, Avitus was assassinated. Following a short period of disgrace, Apollinaris Sidonius tried to make a return to "big politics". In 458 he again composed a panegyric to the new emperor, Valerius Majorian, and was rewarded with a high office at the court.

But soon Majorian abdicated and died, and was succeeded by Livius Severus, who was himself succeeded by Anthemius. For the panegyric he had dedicated to the latter, Apollinaris Sidonius was granted the office of prefect of Rome. But his career broke off abruptly. He entered the church and soon found himself in Gaul, where he was consecrated bishop of Clermont. He took part in a Gaulo-Roman uprising against the Goths (in 475-476), and was taken prisoner by Euric, king of the Visigoths. He was released from prison only shortly before his death. As we see, the life of one man illustrated the precipitous passage of political and cultural power from the state to the church.

The poetry of Apollinaris Sidonius was shot through with a pagan feeling for the world around him. Heathen gods patronising his characters, and scores of maenads and fauns, philosophers and courtesans, passed in succession through his poetry. He complained against the barbarians, whom he despised with true Roman arrogance.

After his consecration as bishop, Apollinaris Sidonius showed a predilection to writing letters, taking the messages of Symmachus as a model. Indeed, for the Middle Ages, Apollinaris Sidonius was himself an authority in letter-writing. Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of Salisbury, William of Malmesbury, and other prominent writers and philosophers of the 12th century, tended to quote

Apollinaris Sidonius. He was also considered an authority on rhetoric, and was rated alongside Horace.

Blossius Aemilius Dracontius, who lived in Carthage at the end of the 5th century, when the city was held captive by the Vandals, was a rich man and a jurist holding important offices. The ill-fame of the Vandals as destroyers of culture, was no longer entirely justified. The Vandal kings even tried, clumsily it is true, to gain the repute of patrons of the arts and sciences. Schools of rhetoric continued to function in Africa, which they had made their domain. And it was also in Africa, under the Vandals, that the *Latin Anthology*, the finest collection of rhetoric poetry, saw the light of day.

One day, however, Dracontius imprudently dedicated a poem to the Byzantine emperor. This was enough for Gunthamund, king of the Vandals, to accuse him of high treason and fling him into gaol.

Bereft of support by his friends, who immediately turned away from him, the poet spent a long time in captivity. Finally, he wrote a poem to the king, pleading for pardon. But the prisoner's poetic endeavours failed to yield the desired result. Many more years passed before he regained his freedom.

Dracontius' writings break down distinctly into two parts, the Christian and the pagan. For centuries, as a rule, his pagan and Christian texts were transcribed and published separately, for they simply could not go together. His well-known poem on the creation of the world gravitated towards the Christian poetry of Juvenk, Prudentius and Sedulius, while his pagan verse was written in the traditional school manner. Following Ovid's example, he wrote of the abduction of Helen and of the vengeance of Medea. His poetry showed how intricate and painful the process had been of the inter-penetration of the pagan and Christian cultural traditions, a process that was still far from its completion in the 5th century.

This was also borne out by the writings of Venantius Fortunatus, a poet who lived a hundred years after Dracontius in Merovingian Gaul and who was said to be ei-

ther the Last of the Romans or the first medieval poet of France. He was born around 530 in Treviso, Italy, and died around 600. Educated in the schools of Ravenna, where remnants of the antique learnedness were still to be found, he was later accepted at the courts of the Frankish kings, to whom he wrote panegyrics and poems. A typical piece of his was the epithalamium he composed on the marriage of Sigebert, king of Austrasia, and the Visigoth princess Brunhilde (an event that is also depicted in the *Nibelungenlied*). In the epithalamium, the newlyweds, who were Christians, were, however, blessed by Venus and her son Cupid, while the bridegroom was likened to Achilles. The effusive praise and prolific references to mythological characters flattered the Christian rulers and were liked by early medieval writers, such as Paulus Diaconus and Bede Venerabilis.

In sum, the poets of the transitional period from Antiquity to the Middle Ages did not reject the ancient gods or the rules of classic poetry or rhetoric. And their influence on the literature of later centuries, highly diverse and often quite astonishing in form, became an important element of cultural continuity in the development of Western Europe.

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## SCIPIO'S DREAM AND THE COSMIC RIDDLE

On the first day of the Saturnalia a distinguished gathering honoured the house of Macrobius, a Roman patrician. Among the guests were Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, princeps of the Senate, the court quaestor Nicomachus Flavianus, and prefect of Rome Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, all of them pagans faithful to the holies of their ancestors, and, indeed, to the antique philosophy and literature.

Praetextatus, priest of the Sun and Vesta, goddess of the hearth, and of various Egyptian and Asiatic gods, dreamed like Emperor Julian of creating a syncretic pagan religion and engaged in the study of philosophy. He also occupied himself translating Aristotle's *Analytics*. His contemporaries compared him with Cato and Cincinnatus, both of them paragons of Roman virtue and revered in history. Flavianus was the moving spirit of the pagan party, and Symmachus had the reputation of an incorruptible statesman.

These eminent Romans became the main characters of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, which was written at the end of the 4th century.

Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius was born somewhere in the latter half of the 4th century A. D., probably in the 360s, in Northern Africa which, we may recall, had given the world no few extraordinary writers and thinkers (such as Augustine and Martianus Capella).

Macrobius is thought to have been of Greek origin, but took Roman scholarship and the Latin language for his own. He held a variety of high administrative offices — that of prefect of Spain at the end of the 4th century, proconsul of Africa in 410, and chamberlain of the royal court in 422 — and was no outsider among the Roman nobility. The fact that he had occupied such high offices at a time when paganism had already been officially outlawed, leads to the conclusion that he may have been formally baptised. Yet his writings leave no doubt as to his dislike of Christianity.

Macrobius' writings that have come down to us, chiefly the *Saturnalia* and the *Commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio"*, contain no mention of Christianity. So much so that if these writings had been the only source of our knowledge of the times, it would never have occurred to us to assume any decline of paganism, and of Rome, or the existence of any rival religion.

The question of which came first, the *Saturnalia* or the *Commentary*, is still liable to cause controversy. Some think that the *Commentary* was the first to be written, being more complicated in content and style, while the *Saturnalia* was meant to popularise the same subject matter and elucidate the Neoplatonist ideas. But the point of view that the *Commentary* came after *Saturnalia* since it was more serious and more mature, has more adherents, and the date of its writing is estimated to have been A. D. 410. Whatever the case, both works were conspicuous products of their times and exercised a tremendous influence on Western Europe's medieval culture.

But back to Praetextatus, Flavianus and Symmachus, who were guests at festivities honouring Saturn, the most ancient of Rome's ancient gods with whom Roman myths associated the idea of a golden age. The festivities were in December and were marked by revels, feasts, and games. Among the other guests of Macrobius were Servius, author of a commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, the physician Disarius, a learned Egyptian by name of Horus, the Greek rhetorician Eusebius and, last but not



least, the philosopher Eustachius. The distinguished gathering had come to revel in a magnificent feast of the spirit. One of the guests, tactless Evangelus, tended to express opinions that shocked the assembly: he questioned the authority of Virgil in matters of philosophy and poetry, and set "provocative" questions. The other men at the feast honed their wits to prepare fitting replies.

Macrobius' *Saturnalia* belongs among the symposia, that is, among discussions at parties for drinking and conversation, initiated by Plato's dialogue *Symposium*. Another *Symposium*, by Xenophon of Athens, who, like Plato, was a disciple of Socrates, was a dialogue presenting Socrates as the chief figure. Plutarch, Greek biographer and moralist, wrote *Symposium of the Seven Sages* and *Nine Books of Symposiac Matters*. There was also a *Symposium* (Banquet of Philosophers) by Lucian, the Greek satirist, and another by Apuleius, and one in the *Satyricon* of Gaius Petronius. In all these cases a symposium was identified as a feast at which its participants engaged in philosophical debate. In the 3rd century A. D., Athenaeus wrote *The Banquet of Sophists*, also known as *The Deipnosophists*, of which 15 of the original 30 books are extant. Julian the Apostate, too, wrote a *Symposium*, known in English as *The Caesars*, a satire in the Senecan vein. And in the 4th century, Methodius of Pathara, a father of the church, produced his *Feast of the Ten Virgins*, using dialogue to come to grips with heretics and the remnants of paganism.

The feast described by Macrobius lasted for three days. Before dinner, the guests discussed "high philosophy", religion, science, and literature, while after dinner they conversed more liberally, even frivolously. One morning the discussion centred on the finer points of Virgil, while in the afternoon of that day the gathering was occupied determining why women drank less than men and why black pudding was bad for the stomach.

Certainly, in modern parlance the *Saturnalia* may be described as popular science. The discussions were comprehensible not only to a select few, but also to all in the

least educated people. Since in the Latin-speaking West the 4th century was a time of lively educational activity, we can take it for granted that the *Saturnalia* pursued educational as well as philosophic goals. It was a sort of compendium of traditional learnedness and wisdom<sup>1</sup> — and, what is more, consisted largely of fragments from the writings of Macrobius' predecessors.

This brings us back to authorship in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The new European culture values a treatise for its originality above all else, whereas in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages people set the greatest store by authority and prestige. What is more, originality and novelty were at times considered negative, while the authority of a quoted philosopher, writer, ecclesiastic or politician, could make a treatise valuable.

This was a view held by pagan and Christian authors alike. The cento, a piece of writing, especially a poem, consisting wholly of quotations from the works of other authors, was indeed, the predominant genre in the literature of the 4th to 7th centuries.

The trend in the works of Macrobius was Neoplatonist. His chief sources were Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and other Neoplatonists. The message of the *Saturnalia* was, revere Antiquity,<sup>2</sup> a motto the Renaissance humanists would have subscribed to without a murmur. Macrobius wished to preserve Antiquity intact, but his intention came into collision with the call of the times. The participants in his symposium expounded ancient doctrines. They spoke of ancient gods and customs. But all of them were preoccupied in presenting the spiritual heritage of the past as a unity that resulted, in the long run, in a search for a divine ideal. In effect, Macrobius was enthralled by Neoplatonist ideas and images. He set forth in plain, comprehensible terms Plotinus' teaching of the universal intellect, immanent in life and indissolubly connected with it. In the Middle Ages, indeed, his writings were the main source of information about Plotinus and his philosophy.

Macrobius set about building a single and immaculate picture of the universe reflecting all subsistences, with the

One, the Mind, the World Soul, the Kosmos, Numerals and Matter figuring as a Unity. The Mind was for him the prototype of all things. It was central to all the ideas and images that were at the root of all other being. A follower of Plotinus, he believed that mythology reposed on that each god, each idea, was the prototype and polar expression of some aspect of being. The world of ideas thus passed into another state, first in meaning and concept, and thereupon materially, with the assistance of the World Soul, which was the vital force of all existence. The Soul gave life to the Kosmos, to the celestial bodies, the luminaries, and the bodies of people, animals and plants, placing them in an order according to the hierarchy of being.

Everlasting life was descent of the soul and matter from the higher to the lower, and thereupon their ascent from the lower to the higher. This eternal connection of the consummated and the unconsummated was like Homer's golden chain which linked the universe.

The symbolic view of mythology as presented in the *Saturnalia*, closer to logic than to mysticism, inspired many a medieval philosopher and poet, who did not hesitate to borrow from Macrobius the magnificent and all-encompassing image of the Golden Chain that linked all things on earth.

Macrobius' symbolic view of things amounted to a peculiar form of estrangement (from the surrounding life), and a means of showing the multiplicity and diversity of being and the ways it was reflected.

This is most vividly depicted in four books of the *Saturnalia* containing an allegorical interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Macrobius, who thought very highly of Virgil, likened his poetry to the activity of the primordial mover of the universe. As the Highest Principle created the universe, so did Virgil create a poetic world no less real in words as the world was real in being.

Virgil, as Macrobius saw it, gave meaning to human existence. He took man to the summits of morality. He taught man to live righteously. He revealed the hidden

sense of subsistence through allegories, and predicted the future. Virgil was not simply a poet who composed astonishingly beautiful verse. He was a creator with next to divine functions. He was teacher and soothsayer, knower of secrets, and prophet. He was the bearer of morality and knowledge. His authority was as indisputable as Homer's, Plato's and Cicero's, those greatest of men who, as Macrobius put it, were the teachers of mankind.

Eight centuries later the great medieval poet Dante, who in his *Divine Comedy* chose Virgil as his guide to the nether world and teacher in life (not without Macrobius' influence, I imagine), would define the notion of authority as follows: it was the same as an action worthy of being trusted and obeyed. Virgil, in the eyes of Macrobius and Dante was utterly worthy.

Macrobius' commentary on Virgil, like the commentary of his friend Servius, was, on the one hand, a kind of scientific review of the Roman poet's works flowing directly from the practices of the rhetorical school and the system of Roman education that reposed first of all on the study of the classics. On the other hand, both Servius and Macrobius contributed visibly to the spread of the Virgilian myth that figured prominently in the medieval culture and thus influenced the European culture of modern times.

Virgil was one of the chief subjects in Roman and medieval schools. He was one of the most popular authors. There are numerous transcribed copies of his writings extant, dating to the 2nd and the subsequent centuries up to the 15th. By Macrobius' time commentaries on Virgil had spread across four centuries. Among his commentators were Asinius Pollio, Varius Rufus, Melissus (in the 1st century A.D.), and the distinguished grammarians Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (1st century A.D.) and Aelius Donatus (4th century). Suetonius, author of *Lives of the Caesars*, also wrote a life of Virgil which, I am sorry to say, has not survived.

The high standard of Roman pagan culture that was Virgil's also attracted the attention of Christians. Church father Jerome (4th century) put him down as obligatory

reading at the monastic school in Bethlehem, and Augustine, another father of the church, found that Virgil had a soul that was Christian in nature. This viewpoint Virgil owed above all to his 4th eclogue, a pastoral poem in which he predicted the birth of an infant lord whose coming would give the start to another golden age. The Christians regarded this vague prophesy as a prediction of the coming of Christ. Besides, winning Virgil to its side buttressed the Christian ideology, for his works embraced all of the Roman culture. That is why, perhaps, Christians were so eager to portray Virgil as a spirit who had a presentiment of the coming of the Saviour and who was unhappy in the pagan atmosphere.

The works of Virgil, which abound in imagery and symbolism, provided fertile soil for allegorical interpretations, including Christian ones, as the medieval commentaries on the poet amply show.

The fact that Macrobius tried his hand at interpreting Virgil was quite in keeping with the pagan Roman cultural tradition. But the other reason was his under-the-surface polemics with Christian attempts at securing Virgil as a follower of Christ. Macrobius, too, created the image of a "bright" Virgil, the prophet of a Golden Age, which for him was not the age of the Saviour but a return to the times of Saturn that came on the heels of the then ending Iron Age of Diana.

In the *Saturnalia* we are shown Virgil's other hypostasis, that of a man who has cognised the deep-down secrets of being, of the beginning and the end, a man who was sorcerer and magician. With Virgil's name Macrobius associated divination and the practice of secret-knowing which Romans of his time treated in all earnest and with superstitious dread.

In sum, Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, like the commentary of Servius, fed the tradition of the "dark" Virgil, magician and necromancer, which had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages. He was said to have visited Hades and to have the power of controlling evil spirits. In the 16th century, tales of the "dark" Virgil were gathered in a collection of the most unlikely information, namely, that Virgil

had by his sorcery founded the city of Naples, or that he had done away with the Roman emperor, and so forth.

Whatever the case, Macrobius endeavoured to prevail on his readers that poetry was not simply the art of composing verse, and that it also stood for omniscience and rhetoric, philosophy, theology, and allegory. This idea proved highly important for the Middle Ages. Though *Saturnalia* was not a poem, Macrobius tried to follow the above model, thus producing a unique encyclopaedia of knowledge, beliefs, and the intellectual life of his era, though, it is true, he raised it to an ideal in the spirit of pagan Antiquity and omitted everything that concerned struggle against Christianity.

Still, written at a most difficult time for the people of Rome, particularly the pagans, *Saturnalia*, did not bear the imprint of the portentous events and of any presentiment of the end that was typical for the Christian literature of that period. It might be termed a paradox, indeed, that bearers of the still new ideology which had just emerged victorious, were troubled by visions of Doomsday and depicted the suffering that would be heaped on sinners, while the last surviving pagans remained majestically tranquil, indulging in contemplation, a picture of moral dignity that fed on the virtues of their ancestors and on an unshakeable belief in their truth.

While the triumphant Christians, who had the backing of the state, heaped the most dastardly charges upon the heads of their enemies, the pagans made not a single reproof and preferred to discuss the eternal problems of being in strict accordance with the antique love of wisdom, sidestepping here-and-now realities and arguments. Perhaps this was a token of the nobility and elitism of the moribund antique culture which, among other things, made it "standard" and "eternal" in the eyes of later generations.

But this "splendid isolation" was also the cause and indicator of the withering and weakening of the pagan culture, which proudly avoided responding to the Christian

attacks, insults and destructive actions, while looking desperately for ways of preserving its finest achievements amidst the chaos of wars, barbarian invasions, religious strife, and human suffering.

In his *Commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio"*, Macrobius concentrated on a fragment of the concluding part of Cicero's *Republic*. Indeed, this piece of the great Roman orator had been known for a number of centuries exclusively through the above-named commentary. And that alone made it a major cultural service to posterity.

Cicero, we may recall, had chosen Plato's *Republic* as a model for his treatise. But while the Greek thinker's dialogue was a sort of utopia, a vision of an ideal state, Cicero's treatise was inspired by the Roman state, by its history. Still, the *Dream of Scipio* was the least practicable part of Cicero's vision, for in it he dealt not only with the future of Rome, but also synthesised the most general notions of God, the World, the State, Man, the Soul's fate after death, and so on.

These, in substance, were the problems that troubled the minds of philosophers in the early centuries after Christ. They stood at the centre of the ideological and religious polemics of the 3rd and 4th centuries, and were dealt with both by the pagan Neoplatonists and the Christian theologians. It seems, therefore, that Macrobius chose this fragment quite deliberately, because it enabled him to set forth his views on the key ideological issues of his time.

The plot in Cicero's fragment was simple. Scipio the Younger, grandson of Scipio Africanus, the Elder, who had crushed Hannibal in the battle of Zama, sees his grandfather in a dream. He asks his celebrated ancestor about the fate that awaits the Roman Empire, and the truth about the nature of the universe, the soul, life and death, glory, and so on. Scipio the Elder replies that life on earth is in fact the same as death (a view which is equally consonant with Platonism and with Christianity), and that true life is in store for none but the select, for those who save the homeland in an hour of need, who serve it, and extend its boundaries. That was why, Cicero

said, great Romans continued to live in the celestial realm after their death on earth. This elitist approach, which awarded immortality to none but heroes, suited the frame of mind of the select circle of pagan patricians of which Macrobius was a member.

Thinking and philosophising, too, as Macrobius saw it, was the exclusive privilege of people belonging to the upper circle, reared in the spirit of the old culture. An indigent person, someone who came from the commonalty, could become a saint or an ascetic, but certainly not a real philosopher.

The rockbottom verities of being, Macrobius held, were at times concealed even from the initiated, and might be accessible only to the highest of men, those with a perfect intellect. The others had to be content with the ritual drama that presented the truth in allegorical form, this preventing it from becoming universal and common. To be sure, this was a postulate of Neoplatonism, which Macrobius espoused and championed.

The last and the highest synthesis of antique philosophy, Neoplatonism developed as a doctrine of and for the select. The intricate Neoplatonist philosophical constructions were not always comprehensible even to scholars. (That was one of the reasons why, evidently, Macrobius set out to elucidate them.) An esoteric mystery enshrouded not only the doctrine itself, but also its most illustrious adepts—Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus. Yet it had no trace of the latter-day European individualism and subjectivism, and no trace of any cult of an isolated personality who despised the mob and all public things because of his pride, self-will, and titanism. The exclusiveness and “incomprehensibility” of Neoplatonism were due above all to its having accumulated and regenerated the enormous thought material of Antiquity, creating its own framework of thoughts, feelings, and images. All this was encoded in the philosophical essence of the antique world outlook.

To understand Macrobius, it is also important to note that for him, the prestige of the Roman culture was closely



connected with the prestige of the Roman statehood. The Roman elite was bearer of the idea of empire as a universal authoritarian power which encompassed religious, political and cultural values. The philosophy of the 4th and 5th centuries could, therefore, be nothing but objectively idealistic. The dispute was between the more reasonable and the mystic intuitive versions, between the more personalised versions and those that gravitated towards a non-personalised absolute, the more spiritualist versions and those that left some room for sensual empiricism, and so on. And since in those times people generally wished to think in philosophical terms, their thinking was geared to Platonism.

The concepts and terms used by the Platonists formed a common language. The contending parties used that language to make themselves understood, to debate the controversial issues. Platonism was conceived in two varieties — the Stoic or more old-fashioned, and the Neoplatonist or newer, with rationalist correctives provided by Aristotle. Macrobius paid tribute both to the Stoic variety, especially that preached by Numenius of Apamea, a forerunner of the Neoplatonists, and to Neoplatonism proper, following in the footsteps of its originator Plotinus, the Syrian Neoplatonist Iamblichus, and Porphyry, who arranged the philosophy of Plotinus in a system.

Cicero, who flirted with Platonism, is interpreted by Macrobius in an entirely Neoplatonist spirit, though Macrobius himself had not differentiated between Platonism and Neoplatonism. To be sure, like other commentators of his time, Macrobius did not always faithfully follow the subject of the fragment under discussion. Often, he used the fragment of the treatise he was commenting on as a pretext for parading his own scholarship. Happily, this introduced the reader to various fields of antique knowledge.

The four introductory chapters in the *Commentary* deal with the points of resemblance and the differences in approach to the State, to the social arrangements, of Plato and Cicero. Macrobius himself insisted on the State playing the role of organiser of human life. The second chapter is important, for here Macrobius came to grips with

the Epicureans, who had rejected Plato, and argued that a vision, a dream, even a conjecture, could be the object of a serious philosophical discussion and could lead the way to the truth. He vindicated their allegorical significance, the philosophical conception of a myth, and was here totally consonant with Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and the other Neoplatonists. He thus set the stage for the widespread use of allegorical interpretations, with special emphasis on visions and apparitions, in medieval Western Europe.

Macrobius also briefly set forth the Neoplatonist conception of how the world was arranged, pointing at once to the limitations of any allegorical interpretation: "We must not, however, think that philosophers justify conjecture even if it has a basis in fact... They usually do when meditating about the Soul or the spiritual potentials of air and ether and other substances in the lower and upper atmosphere, or when discussing gods in general. But when the discussion concerns the Supreme or Primordial God, he whom the Greeks call the Good and the First Cause, or when it concerns the Mind which the Greeks call Nus and which contains species that give birth to things called Ideas—I repeat, when they speak of this, that is, of the Supreme God and the Mind, they never indulge in any conjectures. When they wish to describe those who transcend the limits of speech and, indeed, human apprehension, they turn to similes or analogies."<sup>3</sup>

Macrobius observed that the Supreme Good, the prime mover, could be likened to the Sun (a simile highly popular among Neoplatonists). He identified the Supreme Good and the One with Apollo, god of light (by giving the etymology of the name *A-pollo*, that is, negation of multiplicity, which he evidently borrowed from Plotinus).

The World Soul, he averred, animated Nature and gave it the principle of life. But the mechanism whereby it functioned was comprehensible to only a select few. It did not appear on the surface and was seen as a mystery that could be reflected in a myth or conjecture, and thus made comprehensible. Hence, when speaking of the Soul and its offspring, interpretations of conjectures were highly in-

structive. (Slightly over a century later, Boethius, a thinker who also gravitated towards Neoplatonism, would follow Macrobius' advice and interpret the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as an allegory that revealed the liberation of the human soul.)

Thus, already in the opening chapters, Macrobius laid claim to the Neoplatonist system of images reflecting the hierarchy of being: the One, the Mind, and the Soul, which comprised a dialectical triad and were not simply an abstract limit of all subsistence, but gave rise to the multiplicity of all existing Nature through *eide* or ideas.

In the third chapter, Macrobius classified dreams, dividing them into five types: mysterious or enigmatic dream (*somnium*); prophetic vision (*visio*); oracular dream (*oraculum*); nightmare (*insomnium*), and fantastic apparition (*visum*). This classification essentially followed that of Artemidorus Daldianus (2nd century A.D.), a Greek soothsayer and author of a treatise, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which was widely known in Antiquity, and which served as source material for the countless dream-divining handbooks of later times. But, of course, Macrobius did not always agree with Artemidorus, possibly because there were intermediaries between them, such as Porphyry, some of whose treatises referred to dream-divining. It is also possible that both Macrobius and Artemidorus had a common source, particularly the writings on that subject of Posidonius, a most interesting 1st-century Stoic philosopher, a forerunner of Neoplatonism, some elements of whose doctrine about the living and spiritualised Kosmos were discernible in Macrobius. Besides, when describing dreams, Macrobius referred among others to Homer and Virgil. We might recall that Plato, too, had an interest in visions and apparitions, and that he depicted the "vision" of Er, one of his characters who visited the nether world and returned to earth. Notably, Er's landscape description resembled those depicted in medieval "visions".

The popularity of Macrobius' treatise in the Middle Ages probably matched that of Artemidorus' book of dreams. The cognitive and prophetic meaning of dreams

and "visions", highly valued in the official culture of the Middle Ages, but even more highly in the public mind, as we see, was thus "theoretically" substantiated not only by Christian theology, especially the part designed to appeal to the mass of believers, but also by pagan tradition.

The fourth chapter was a commentary on Scipio the Elder's assertion that the soul was immortal. The select, who had done their duty by their fatherland, became eternal residents in Heaven or, more precisely, in the Milky Way.

The fifth chapter was clear evidence that Macrobius used Cicero's treatise not merely to comment on it as such, but to give the broadest possible rendering of contemporary knowledge in the subjects concerned. Scipio the Elder's curt remark about the time Scipio the Younger would attain the peak of fame, was used by Macrobius to display his scholarship in arithmetic and symbolic interpretation of numerals. Principally, Macrobius proceeded from Pythagorean postulates. This made him an authority on the "theology of numerals", on their symbolical interpretation (which became widespread in medieval Europe), of the same stature as the Roman encyclopaedist Marcus Terentius Varro, writer of the *Introductio Arithmetica* Nicomachus, Chalcidius who wrote a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, and the 5th- to 7th-century enlighteners Martianus Capella, Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore of Seville.

The sixth chapter dealt directly with the symbolical and sacramental sense of the numerals from one to eight and their combinations. Macrobius offered a fuller presentation (than other authors) of the symbolism of the numeral seven in its Neoplatonist sense. To begin with, seven was a combination of one and six; simultaneously, it contained the male and female principles, the even and the odd. One was not simply a numeral; it was the source and beginning of all other numerals; it was the monad, the beginning and the end of all things. It was the symbol of the Supreme God, the One, and also symbolised the Mind, which was derived from the One and was always beyond change, that is, beyond time, timeless in

the present, and contained the endless multiplicity of all subsistence. The monad might also be referred to the Soul. The Soul was free of connections with anything material since it corresponded exclusively to its Creator; but it animated the universe, linking the Mind and pure Nature. The monad was also the symbol of the First Cause of all substances. The impeccable monad embodied the Virgin (Athena). And through the monad this impeccability was passed on to the numeral seven, which "was not born nor could bear itself"; it was also the symbol of Athena Pallas.

The numeral six, which jointly with one composed seven, had "many virtues and possibilities". The ancients called it "perfect". The six passed on its perfection to the seven. The seven took in the virtues of two other pairs of numerals that composed it: the two (diad) and the five, and the three and the four.

The numeral two, since it followed the monad, was the first numeral in the basic sense. It was the first to drop away from the Almighty and to become changeable. Hence, it belonged in the celestial spheres, among the planets, the Sun and Moon, because they, too, were separated from the immobile prime mover and were moving according to the rhythm of numerals.

The numeral five possessed extraordinary power, because it encompassed everything that had being or was predetermined to appear in the future. That is, it concentrated everything that was in the lower and upper levels of being: the Supreme God, the Mind, the World Soul, that source of all souls, and the heavenly and earthly worlds. In short, the numeral five summed up the entire universe.

The pair consisting of the numerals three and four, was also full of sacramental meaning: the three was the principle that linked all things, and the four symbolised the four elements that composed the world, that is, its prime foundation; it symbolised the four basic properties of all existing things (with a reference to Plato's *Timaeus*). Thus, having encompassed all the main virtues, the seven was the key to the universe.

The other numerals and geometrical figures Macrobius treated in the same vein. He saw them as representing world harmony, which was imbued with a numerical rhythm. Part of the chapter was devoted to a symbolical interpretation of the part played by numerals in human lives. Here Macrobius drew on the works of Hippocrates and those of Pseudo-Iamblichus.

The question of civic and human virtues ranked high in Roman literature, which attached enormous importance to ethics and morality. Some centuries later, it became central also to the humanistic ethics of the European Renaissance. So, Macrobius devoted his eighth chapter to the question of virtues. For him, the presence of certain virtues was a guarantee of the immortality of their bearer's soul. Let us recall that Scipio the Elder named salvation and aggrandisement of the fatherland as one of the prime conditions for immortality. For, as he put it, nothing could please the Supreme Ruler more than the glorious and worthy association, or community of people known as the State, a State based on justice.

This claim, which flowed from the very essence of the Roman vision of the world, with civic commitment and the State raised to an absolute, was completely at variance with the Christian view of the immortality of the human soul, which depended directly on divine grace and on virtues of a purely individualist nature conceived in a religious spirit.

Rulers and champions of the fatherlands were the first, in Macrobius' opinion, to merit immortality. He overruled the opinion of philosophers, particularly Plato and Plotinus, that sages who plumbed the secrets of being and attained the truth, were the most worthy of immortality.

Still, relying on the authority of the thinkers he had refuted, Macrobius classified the virtues, and singled out four: prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. Prudence was essential to contemplate the world serenely, to reject its temptations, and to concentrate the soul on knowing divine things. Temperance or the wish to rise above the wants and passions of the body should be practised to the extent that human nature permitted. (These

ideas were repeated almost word for word by Abelard, the 12th-century thinker, in his *Theologia Christiana*.) Courage was essential for the soul not to fear parting with the body, for it not to fear the ascent to celestial heights. And justice was needed to select the only worthy way of life, serving the loftiest virtues.

This classification of virtues, which originated with Plato, was assimilated in the subsequent philosophical tradition which identified the four main virtues. Ambrose of Mediolan legalised the classification of Plato and Macrobius in Christian theology. The church recognised prudence, temperance, and justice as "natural" virtues, complementing them with the purely religious notions of hope, faith, and love.

Each of the four virtues, in effect, broke down into definite types of virtue: political, moral (purifying the soul), virtues of the pious mind (prompted by wisdom), and exemplary virtues. The individual possessed political virtues because he was a social animal. They prompted the pious to devote themselves to serving the State or society, to defend cities, to display filial piety, to love one's children, and to show concern for one's relatives.

By these political virtues the individual impressed himself upon the memory of his fellow-citizens. To make political sense, the individual rallied his reason and examined human deeds in the light of the Divine Authority. To acquire political courage he elevated his mind above fear of danger, and feared nothing but ingratitude. He was able to bear adversity and accept prosperity with equal humility. Political temperance required him to avoid ignoble acts and immoderate desires. This went hand in hand with modesty, self-restraint, abstinence, honesty, level-mindedness, and piety.

Political justice was associated with obligatory concern for one's fellow-citizens and those for whose fate one bore responsibility. Justice gave rise to honest relations, friendship, harmony, sense of duty, piety, love, and human sympathy.

Political virtues enabled the individual to master himself, and then also become ruler of a State or leader of

some human community — one who never forgot his obligations to his fellow-citizens.

Virtues of the second type, those which purified, enabled the individual to attain divinity. They were the virtues of contemplation rather than those of a statesman. They were conceived through wisdom, through rejection of earthly things and carnal pleasures. They were the virtues of philosophers. The third type included virtues of the consummate mind which had cast off earthly bonds and acquired serenity. They were the undisguised courage and bravery of the sage who did not suppress his passions but had cast them off and strove for divine reason. The fourth type consisted of archetype virtues that resided in the divine reason proper. From them emanated the virtues of the above three types.

The 9th to 14th chapters of the first book were the most important part of Macrobius' commentary. They were its core, for they presented the doctrine on the Soul that was the most conspicuous part of Neoplatonism. They showed how the Soul descended from the upper spheres to within earthly limits, and then ascended again. This plot had in those times preoccupied not only philosophers and theologians, but also the mass of pagans and, especially, Christian proselytes. Suffice it to recall how fervidly believers questioned Augustine on that score. Numerous treatises on the Soul had come down to us from the 4th and 5th centuries, and it was not surprising at all that Macrobius, too, aired his views on that sensitive point.

He observed that those philosophers "whose views are correct" <sup>4</sup> (that is, primarily followers of Plato) had never doubted that souls had a divine beginning, and that, more, while they stayed near their place of origin, they possessed the highest wisdom and knowledge of the truth. Then, descending from the heights through heavenly spheres to be installed in their dungeons, the earthly bodies of men, they gradually lost that wisdom and knowledge of the truth. The downward passage through each level of the hierarchically constructed universe led to loss of a particle of the soul's perfect virtues and erased memories of its origin.



A most delicate substance when not burdened by anything corporeal, the Soul resided in the uppermost levels of celestial space in the immediate proximity of Pure Reason and Light. But when it merged with the body and allowed the passions of the body to take charge, the human being was like an animal. Such a soul trembled with fear when departing the body, because it resided in the earthly shadows. It was afraid of incorporeity and was eager to install itself in some other body, whether that of a human or a beast. To describe the "fall" of the soul, Macrobius referred to the concluding line in Virgil's *Aeneid*, "and with one groan indignant ... [it] took flight".

The idea of the transmigration of souls was typical of the ancient Egyptian and of the Hindu religions. It occurred in the Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines. The circulation and return of souls is referred to also in Plato's *Phaedo*, and, among other Neoplatonist writings, in Porphyry's *De Reditu Anima*, which influenced Macrobius. Isidore of Seville would recall the subject in the 7th century, and Vincent of Beauvais, author of the celebrated *Mirror of Nature* (*Speculum Majus*), the most complete encyclopaedia of his time, in the 12th century.

Not all souls, however, were consigned to transmigration. After the death of the body, the souls of rulers and sages who had not forgotten their celestial origins and had fulfilled their duty, returned to their home, which they may be said never to have parted with.<sup>5</sup> Small wonder, Macrobius noted, that the ancients counted founders of cities and heroes who had distinguished themselves in service to their earthly fatherland, among the gods. Their souls, philosophers assumed, returned to the highest spheres of the universe, extemporal. And they resided in the stellar part of the universe, never to return to any earthly bodies. The Milky Way, Macrobius pointed out, was part of that immobile stellar sphere, and Scipio the Elder was absolutely right when he said that rulers and defenders of the State acquired everlasting shelter there, never to return to earth.

Macrobius elaborated on Plato's theory of a "first and second death", which was also picked up by medieval

theology and literature. Like Plato, he regarded the body as the soul's tomb or dungeon, but added that the merging of the soul and body through the act of human birth was in fact the moment of the soul's death or, at best, its death-like sleep. The death of the body was congruent with the rebirth of the soul, which thereby gained an opportunity to ascend to the First Cause. Corporeal death was apparent to everyone; only the sages knew that the death of the body led to the rebirth of the soul.

Macrobius observed that most people did not understand why the god of death was sometimes called magnificent and rich, and sometimes cruel. He recalled that one of the names of the god of the underworld and symbol of death and the afterlife was Dis, a word associated with the Latin *ditis* for "rich". (An analogous explanation of the Greek *pluto*, derived from *ploytes* meaning "wealth", is given by Plato. It led to the assumption that Dis may have been a translation of Pluto.)

God was rich, because at the moment of the "first death", that is, the death of the body, the soul gained an opportunity to regain its wealth and the freedom which it by nature possessed. God was cruel, because the soul was consigned to perdition at the moment of the "second death", which looked like life to the unknowing but was really a descent into the oblivion of death.<sup>6</sup>

Macrobius offered an allegorical interpretation of the soul's stay in the infernal regions. In so doing, he referred to the ancient philosophers. The underworld stood for the human body, the tomb in which the soul was enclosed. Lethe, the river of oblivion, symbolised the delusion of a soul that was bereft of knowledge of the truth and had forgotten its origins. Phlegethon was the flaming river of consuming passions and desires. Acheron was the stream of woe and despair, and Cocytus that of lamentation. Then there was the Styx, that is, the burying of human reason in an abyss of utter darkness and hate.

And here was how Macrobius interpreted the punishments of the soul in the kingdom of Dis: the Tantalean torments of thirst and hunger, and the Sisyphean labours and other painful ordeals were a reflection of what hu-

mans experienced in life. They constituted the allegories of the soul's suffering when it woke up to its own delusions and misdeeds. Macrobius gravitated towards Virgil's idea that punishment was inflicted on the soul not from outside, and that "each of us was bearer of his own punishment".<sup>7</sup>

Macrobius' depiction of the soul's journey from the upper strata of the universe to the lower read like an engaging novel. Not surprisingly, it was popular in the Middle Ages. The soul passed the gates of the Sun, which Macrobius located where the Milky Way girdled the Zodiac and where its bigger band crossed the Zodiac through the constellations of Capricorn and Cancer. Macrobius followed Porphyry, who wanted to make his depiction congruent with Homer's tale of the cave on Ithaca. This meant a mistake had been made and the tropics ran across the constellation of Gemini and Sagittarius.

The constellation Cancer was like the gateway to man, because the soul passed through it when descending to the Earth. The constellation Capricorn was the gateway to the gods, because the soul passed through it when ascending to the upper regions. So, the Milky Way was the home of the soul.

Referring for backing to Pythagoras, Macrobius maintained that a newborn infant needed milk because the initial movements of its soul took place in the Milky Way. What a naive, though easily comprehensible, analogy! In the Milky Way, the soul was amid an assembly of gods, but as it descended to the constellation Leo it took its first step towards an earthly existence. Though it was still part of the infinite and indivisible World Soul before it reached the constellation Aquarius. The subsequent emanations made the soul individual. Within the ring of Saturn it acquired reason and understanding, within the ring of Jupiter the ability to act, within the ring of Mars bravery, within the ring of the Sun sensual perception and imagination, within the ring of Venus passions, within the ring of Mercury the ability to speak and explain, and within the ring of the Moon the bodily functions. At this point, the soul lost touch with the world of the gods and became im-

mersed in the corporeal world. The soul was "deafened", as it were. Macrobius' depiction influenced Isidore of Seville, Bede, Dante, and many other medieval writers.

What was important for the Middle Ages was that Macrobius provided a brief but comprehensive and comprehensible depiction of the substance of the Neoplatonist doctrine. He showed the essence of that intricate and refined philosophy in a way that was understood by educated people in the Middle Ages who, as a rule, had no knowledge or merely a smattering of Greek, and could not read the Neoplatonists' works in the original. The 14th chapter was, in a way, a summing up of Neoplatonism.

Macrobius discussed the passage in Cicero where the orator said people were created with the understanding that they must direct their eyes beyond the globe named the Earth, which was located in the middle of the Temple. The reason that men were endowed with, originated from the eternal fire of the stars and planets, those spherical bodies that revolved round, or moved along their own orbits with astonishing speed.

Macrobius explained why Cicero likened the universe to a temple (through Macrobius, indeed, the allegory reached down to European culture). His explanation was nothing if not rationalistic: Cicero had done so to impress the omnipotence and grandeur of the force that so consummately directed the magnificent immensity of the universe upon those who worshipped as gods only the visible heavens and stars. Macrobius endeavoured to compound aesthetic perception with abstract cognition, to explain the invisible through the visible, and abstract ideas through images.

The medieval philosophers and poets, and the artists whose genius created the medieval cathedrals, would follow suit. Not only did they dedicate their handiwork to the glory of the Almighty, but also made it a model and encyclopaedia of a universe all their own. Most likely, too, they had never heard of Macrobius. But their closeness to him spoke of the affinity of this Last of the Romans with the Middle Ages, more intimate than any direct borrowing could have done. Macrobius' ideas seemed to dissolve

in the spiritual ambiance of the Middle Ages. They became its natural part.

The all-powerful creator of all subsistence, Macrobius said, resided in the same temple as the human race. That was why men should live as creatures endowed with a particle of the divine fire — of reason that was not subject to the laws of the corporeal world and that elevated humans to the level of divinity. The spirit (*animus*), which was also reason, made humans a kin of heaven. God, who was also called the First Cause, was the beginning and source of all things in the past, present, and future. He, the greatest and the most consummate, gave birth to the Mind (*Nous*). When its visage was turned to face the Creator it appeared to be a perfect image of Him. When the visage was turned downward, it ejected the Soul. This World Soul was also part of the Intellect, but as it emanated from it, it was reduced to the universe and body proper, though itself it was incorporeal. It contained pure intellect (*logicon*), but began acquiring sensual perception (*aisthetikon*) and the ability to gain physical substance and growth (*phytikon*).

Pure reason endowed the World Soul with true divinity, while the latter two abilities brought it closer to the material world. The soul created the corporeal world, and man was its most consummate creation. Because it entered him directly, like it did the luminaries and celestial bodies. That was why man's reason was close to heaven, and carried a charge of divinity. (I can hardly overlook the views of the Renaissance humanists, close in meaning, who sought to elevate man to the status of god.)

Descending to the lower regions of the universe, the soul discovered that, being mortal, the realm of corporeal and transient things had deprived it of the integrity and divinity which it had derived from the Intellect. Human bodies, however, though with difficulty, could be the soul's abode, because humans alone walked upright, held heads high, reaching to the skies, and because their heads were like a sphere. Humans were endowed with reason compounded with sensory perception and physique. Thanks to their reason, human beings towered above the

animal and vegetative worlds, and were able to know the laws of the universe.

Macrobius indulged his pride of knowledge by recounting what diverse interpretations had been given to the World Soul in various philosophical doctrines. Plato, he wrote, believed that the soul was a self-motivated entity. Xenocrates saw it as a Numeral that passed on its motion to all other things. Aristotle called it *entelechy*. Pythagoras and Philolaus called it harmony, Posidonius the idea, Asclepiades of Bithynia a harmonious compound of the five senses. Hippocrates, a delicate spirit spread over all parts of the body, Heraclides Ponticus called it light, and Heraclitus the philosopher a spark of stellar flame, Zeno, the Greek Eleatic philosopher, called it a spirit installed in the body, Democritus, a spirit residing in atoms and possessing all the freedom of motion the body permitted, Critolaus, a Greek Peripatetic philosopher, held that the soul consisted of five entities, and Hipparchus, the astronomer, depicted it as a fire, Anaximenes of Miletus as air, Empedocles and Critius as blood, Parmenides as a mixture of earth and fire, Xenophon as earth and water, Boethius a combination of air and fire, and Epicurus as a mixture of heat, air, and breath. It was their common opinion, Macrobius concluded, that the soul was incorporeal and immortal.

Perfection, Macrobius maintained, came down the steps of the universe to the Earth. Then, from the human soul it began its ascent back to the celestial regions, to the First Cause. The human soul, which had hived off from the World Soul, flowed back into it. The same applied to the circulation of matter in the universe, the region where the World Soul originated. It moved from its highest parts, where the Intellect passed into the World Soul and where corporeity appeared, to its lower regions with the heavy and dense Earth at their centre.

This eternal rotation of corporeal and spiritual things, of descent and ascent, formed the great unity of all, higher and lower, subsistence. That, indeed, was the great sacrament of everlasting being, of the endless possibility for perfection, but also of the frightening possibility for be-

coming a nonentity, for losing the supreme principle. It was a paean to man's potentialities. And a warning as well. But without an element of personal tragedy or dread of committing a sin or of everlasting perdition, or of hope for eternal salvation, or any individual responsibility, as was the case with the Christian doctrine.

The human individual carried forward his predestination in the impersonal and everlasting rotation of life. He could not break the great sacramental "golden chain" that linked all the parts of the universe (a metaphor that dates to Homer<sup>8</sup> and was also popular with medieval authors and those of modern times, for example, with Goethe.)

Hence Macrobius' conviction that man was free to dispose of his life. The Stoic tradition accepted that right, and in fitting conditions regarded suicide worthy of a true citizen. Christianity, on the other hand, owing to its individualistic tradition, recoiled from suicide as from the greatest of sins. Macrobius assumed that when a person dies the soul should depart from the body according to the law of the universe, of Nature, without interfering with the great universal connection. When an individual became aware that there was a deformation of that connection in his own life, he was entitled to resort to the extreme option. Here, Macrobius referred to Plotinus. Some scholars espy Porphyry's influence here, but it seems to me that Macrobius was at place with himself and with his perception of the Kosmos.

Macrobius was faithful to the Neoplatonist interest in cosmological matters. For him they were more astronomical than philosophical. Indeed, he devoted a considerable part of his treatise, from the 14th chapter of the first book to the 9th chapter of the second, to astronomy.

In the Middle Ages these chapters were often transcribed separately and used as an aid in the study of astronomy, cosmography, and astrology. For Macrobius collected information encountered in the works of many preceding Greek and Latin writers, including Ptolemy, Theon of Smyrne, Hemina, Varro, Pliny, and Chalcidius. Macrobius' *Astronomia* was later extensively used by Mar-

tianus Capella and Isidore of Seville, who worked large parts of it into their own treatises used as textbooks in medieval schools.

Macrobius depicted a spherical Earth, the fixed centre of the universe. Around it seven spheres of planets revolved from west to east, and also the higher celestial sphere from east to west. The motion of the planets took them through the zodiacal belt, one of the eleven large celestial belts, which included the Milky Way, the Arctic and Antarctic belts, the celestial tropic and equator, the meridian, and the horizon. Curiously, Macrobius erred when speaking of the horizon, which he confused as a celestial belt with the visible horizon.

Macrobius admitted that in his discription of the motion of the planets he was somewhere halfway between Plato's position, which accorded with the Egyptian school in his view, and Cicero's, which, it seemed to him, had not escaped Chaldean influences. Neither had he escaped the influence of the antique astronomers Heraclides Ponticus and Aristarchus of Samos. Highly popular in medieval times was Macrobius' description of the size of the Sun and the other celestial bodies, the way of calculating that size, determining astronomical distances, dividing the signs of the Zodiac and the zodiacal belt, and adjusting the instruments used for astronomical observation.

Macrobius' second book dealt with subjects raised in the vast majority of antique and medieval compendiums. It set forth the antique theories of musical consonances (that is, broadly taken harmony), and delved into geography and the basics of map-making (here Macrobius was considered a major authority in the Middle Ages). His successors inherited from this Last of the Romans both entirely realistic and entirely fantastic information, such as the conjecture that the Ocean divided the Earth into two hemispheres, the lower of which was peopled by antipodes.

Macrobius went out of his way to explain the various grades in time. His estimate of the age of the world was 15,000 solar years. The world year was the time all stars and celestial bodies took to make a complete revolution



from the point of departure and back to that point. The lunar year was one month long, the solar year twelve months.

Macrobius completed his geographical excursus with a commentary on the famous and numerous repeated fragment from Cicero's treatise that the Earth if looked upon from Heaven, appeared a tiny dot in space, and any part of the Earth was but a still tinier spot on that tiny dot. I cannot help recalling Dante's reminiscences of Cicero and Macrobius:

*I with my sight returned through one and all  
The sevenfold spheres, and I beheld this globe  
Such that I smiled at its ignoble semblance.*<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the 20th century, when space travel has made us conscious that the Earth is so small and defenceless, Macrobius' thought has become more comprehensible and relevant.

In his concluding chapters, Macrobius returned to the subject of the immortal soul. The structure of his commentary is thus a closed circle — and a circle, we may recall, was considered the symbol of perfection in antique times. All his depictions go back to the point of departure. They become immanently complete, forming an analogy of a circular entity closed within itself, thus becoming a spiritual allegory of the universe.

Macrobius was a contemporary of illustrious thinkers and leaders of the Christian church — Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom. He was in the service of Emperor Theodosius, with whose name we associate the final prohibition of paganism. Yet, as I have noted earlier, there was no hint of the excruciating battle between Christianity and paganism in any of his extant works — not in the *Saturnalia* and not in the *Commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio"*. He made no mention of the triumph of the new religion. Why? Did he not understand the ongoing events? Was it the contemptuous silence of a Roman partician who, like Tacitus, regarded Christianity "a ludicrous superstition not worth noticing"? Or was this silence a tragic last-ditch stand against a new pitiless ideo-

logical and political force that could be neither withstood nor evaded, and which a true Roman, a bearer of ancient glories, could only gloss over and expel, at least from his own spiritual province, protecting the past, and the gods sacred to a Roman, against destruction? In the eyes of so deeply a convinced pagan as Macrobius, Christianity was inimical, incomprehensible, and inexorable.

And Macrobius was not the only one who felt that way about it. Paganism was as staunch in its resistance to Christianity, as the new religion was in the bid for dominance. A century and a half later, another outstanding Roman, Bethius, though the author of a number of theological treatises, would also make no mention of Christianity in his famous *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*). In the 5th century, Claudian, a poet at the court of Christian emperors, would mention Christianity just once in all his writings, and that in a somewhat offhand manner. And Martianus Capella, too, the author of a classic schoolbook of medieval times, would also totally gloss over the subject of Christianity. This leads to the conclusion that these omissions were not accidental, that they were a sort of opposition, an intrinsic disaffection that prevailed among a certain segment of Roman intellectuals, Macrobius included. For them protecting the antique legacy, propagation of the highlights of the ancient culture, systematisation of that culture, was a means of confounding Christianity.

The anti-Christian thrust of that activity grew blunter soon after Macrobius. In the 6th and 7th centuries the baton in that educational drive was picked up by men of the Christian culture, such as Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville. Yet the pagan Macrobius will have set the tune for them, for he systematised antique spiritual values and was the first among the encyclopaedists of that time to pass down the antique heritage to later generations.

The works of Macrobius, and notably his *Commentary on "Dream of Scipio"*, held a special attraction for people of the Middle Ages. To begin with, the subjects he touched

upon were entirely consonant with their way of thinking. In the *Commentary* they found information, some general and some conclusive, about how to classify dreams, and how to interpret numerals, about man's virtues, the hierarchy of the universe, about the celestial and corporeal spheres and planets, the size of the Sun and the Earth, the influence of the signs of the Zodiac, about world harmony and musical consonance, the appearance of different lands, the Ocean, and so on.

People considered Macrobius less an authority in his own right and more an author who had set forth the doctrines and discoveries of the great philosophical schools of Antiquity, first of all the Platonists, Neoplatonists, Aristotelians, Neopythagoreans and Orphics, and the Latin encyclopaedists. In the Middle Ages, for example, Plotinus was known chiefly through the writings of Macrobius, who regarded that first of the Neoplatonists "the wisest of all sages". Macrobius referred time and again to Plotinus' *Enneads*, of which, indeed, the medieval readership learned exclusively from his *Commentaries*. He, too, was chiefly responsible for the popularity in the West of the Neoplatonist Porphyry. In sum, the writings of Macrobius were for the Middle Ages an introduction to Neoplatonism.

But in the Middle Ages the legacy of that Last of the Romans had never been viewed as a purely philosophical one. It was valued as an encyclopaedic collection of antique knowledge, and Macrobius' somewhat didactic style only contributed to that impression. Many handwritten manuscripts have come down to us of fragments of the *Saturnalia* and *Commentary*, each fragment being a complete rendering of some specific subject.

The influence that Macrobius exercised on people's minds was evident already in the early 6th century. Boethius, philosopher and savant of those times, said Macrobius was a "most learned man". Cassiodorus, founder of the Vivarium, that first monastic centre of medieval scholarship, and Isidore of Seville, the first encyclopaedist of the Middle Ages, showed evidence of Macrobius' influence in their writings. The *Saturnalia* had in many ways inspired the writings of the Venerable

Bede, the Anglo-Saxon scholar, historian and theologian, such as *De Temporibus* and *De Ordine Temporum*. *De Ordine Mundi* of Pseudo-Bede also betrayed a distinct influence of Macrobius' *Commentary*. Erigena, a distinguished thinker of the early Middle Ages, also referred to Macrobius, as did members of Charlemagne's Academy, notably the Irishman Dungal.

Little short of an explosion of interest in Macrobius occurred in the 12th and 13th centuries. The brilliant Peter Abelard described him as an astonishing philosopher and interpreter of the great Cicero, and also as the most eminent of Plato's followers. The works of Macrobius served as source material for the outstanding logician Peter the Lombard, for Hugh of St. Victor, an eminent educator of medieval times, and for many other authors. Macrobius exercised a visible influence also on the Chartres school of philosophy, and on the writers of the Abbey of St. Victor. Bernard de Chartres, surnamed Sylvestris, and Guillaume of Conches, known for their free thinking, adorned their writings with passages from Macrobius.

John of Salisbury, one of the most unique medieval thinkers, in his *Policraticus* and Alain de Lille in his *Anticlaudianus* both leaned on Macrobius. And I might add that the Latin scholars had in general exercised a most visible influence on European scholastic philosophy. The *Summa Theologiae* of Alexander of Hales, the *Summa Philosophiae* of Robert Grosseteste, and the *Sententiarum* of Peter the Lombard were all distinctly influenced by Macrobius, as were the writings of Beauvais, that distinguished medieval scholar.

Albertus Magnus, too, relied on Macrobius for source material on Plato and Platonism. So did Thomas Aquinas, the top authority on scholastic philosophy, when writing his *Summa Theologiae*.

In the 14th century, the *Commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio"* was translated into Greek in the Byzantine Empire, and was used as a textbook.

Macrobius with his strong predilection for allegories, for poetic interpretations, and with his system of vivid im-

ages, turned out to be a kindred spirit of the writers and poets of the Middle Ages. His poetic vision of the world did not make for attention to detail or for aesthetic precision. Macrobius' images were illumined by the universal truth and universal beauty. His aesthetics was consonant with the esthetics of the Middle Ages, and made a lasting impression, among others, on the French poet Jean de Meung, author of the celebrated *Roman de la Rose*, the great Dante Alighieri, and Chaucer, forerunner of the English Renaissance.

Petrarch, Pico della Mirandola, and other authors of the Renaissance, quoted liberally from Macrobius.

Macrobius held a special place in medieval geometry and mathematics. Adalbold, the future bishop of Utrecht, recommended Gerbert, a monk who would one day become Pope Sylvester II and who was an outstanding mathematician, to study Macrobius. Along with Chalcidius and Martianus Capella, Macrobius was one of the transmitters of the antique cosmological doctrines who had maintained the scientific astronomical tradition in the West as had Simplicius in the East.

In the Middle Ages, Macrobius also gained a reputation as sorcerer and magician. He was cited in manuals of fortune-telling, interpretation of dreams, and on horoscopes.

In the 15th and 16th centuries alone, the works of Macrobius were published and republished more than 30 times. Adept at philosophy and astronomy, a man who had gained insight into the magic of numbers, a rationalist commentator, and a poetic writer, Macrobius is still a riddle to scholars today because of his unshakeable loyalty to the pagan culture, the culture he had been bred on, and at once his openness to the spiritual winds of the changing epoch. He keeps astounding us by the peculiar mixture of esoteric and rationalist elements in his knowledge.

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## **THE MARRIAGE OF PHILOLOGY AND MERCURY**

Culture works on society through education, among other things, and through the handing down of social, moral, and intellectual values from generation to generation. The school (or some equivalent institution) is, indeed, one of the most effective means of securing a people's spiritual unity. At the same time, however, it is one of the most traditionalist, even conservative, institutions. In the closing antique period and the early Middle Ages, too, it reacted to change much more tardily and far less visibly than any other institution. This created complexity and ambiguity in the school's relationship with the state and church.

Despite the victory of Christianity, the school in the 4th and 5th centuries A. D. was the same as it had been in the Roman Empire's earlier history. And the danger this presented for the new religion was that apart from teaching the three Rs, the school also cultivated a specific mentality. In a way, it moulded the social ideal as suggested by the antique rhetorical literature, then considered the acme of culture and learnedness. For to the Greek and Roman the thought was but a part of the whole, it being more important still to invest that thought in words, that is, to find a precise and eloquent manner of expressing it.

Skilled use of speech and knowledge of literature ranked among the most ennobling civic virtues. A well

schooled individual who was an accomplished speaker to boot, enjoyed the utmost respect among his fellow Romans. Ausonius, poet and rhetorician born in Bordeaux, was in fact more of a Roman than any unlearned native of the Eternal City.

Language was a means of communication, of mutual understanding. It enabled the free and indolent individual to uncover his nature and thereby establish linkage with other free and indolent members of society. That was why the principles of schooling were the same for all segments of society. The difference was in the quantity of what was taught and the accomplishments of the teachers.

In Rome schooling was not a privilege. All those who could afford the tuition sent their children to school. Many private schools existed. Since the reign of Emperor Vespasian (69-79), the state, however, took an increasing interest in public education, subsidised city schools, and paid the salaries of the teaching staffs.

Schools for the poor were usually located at the back of some shop or in the workroom of an artisan or artist. The pupils sat on the floor, and the teacher on a stool. The atmosphere was uninhibited, though corporal punishment was widely applied. The child was flogged for the slightest transgression. And an extant Pompeii fresco depicts such a flogging. The same pattern was maintained in medieval school, with the sole difference, perhaps, that on cold days the children sat on straw pads rather than the bare ground.

The school was of many grades. Apuleius, a Roman poet and writer, wrote that at a feast the first cup quenched your thirst, the second excited merriment, the third gratified the senses, and after the fourth the drinker lost his reason, while at school, that feast of the Muses, it was the other way round: the more one drank, the more one's spirit acquired wisdom and reason. The first grade was learning to read; it smoothed the wrinkles of the mind. Then came the grammarian, who gave a variety of knowledge. And finally came the rhetorician, who imparted eloquence.<sup>1</sup>



He who taught reading and writing, and sometimes also counting, was the first and for some also the last teacher. As a rule, pupils loudly repeated the teacher's words, these endless recitals, as Augustine described them, being "an odious chanting" (*cantio odiosa*).

The first teacher handed the child on to the grammarian. Quintilian, a leading Roman educator, observed that the art of grammar should consist of the skill of speaking without error and explaining the works of poets. Mind you, it was not a simple matter, if one recalls the specificity of Latin, to teach a child to speak correctly. The grammar school had a certain "scientific" leaning. Here, children were taught to comment on the consequential writings of others, not essentially interesting, but vitally instructive as a guide to living.

This applied above all to the works of Virgil and Cicero, and later, among others, to Terence (Publius Terentius Afer) and Sallust (Gaius Sallustius Crispus). The *scholia*, which were originally school commentaries on the *Aeneid*, in fact formed a special branch of the literature of late Antiquity, being teaching aids in the study of ancient culture and the ancient world outlook.

The rhetorician taught the pupils to handle the language, and gave polish to their learning. He taught them speech, elocution, and oratory. Pupils were also expected to be able to invent a fable or to produce a poetic rendering on a given subject. Special books of exercises were in use.

But the system of education was not confined to grammar and rhetoric. Quintilian, for one, insisted that a child should have an encyclopaedic education before it came to the rhetorician. This was in the spirit of the encyclopaedic Greco-Roman culture, which called for comprehensive knowledge of all sides of Nature and human life. To this aim, indeed, Quintilian devoted his *Institutio Oratoria*. The works of Varro and Pliny the Elder, too, were encyclopaedic teaching aids.

A seven-part curriculum, which included the seven liberal arts—grammar, dialectics, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—became the most

widespread. It took its roots from the times of Plato and Aristotle, and was considered preparatory to the assimilation of philosophy, the science of sciences, the quintessence of antique learning. Gradually, the seven liberal arts broke up into two grades—the lower, known as the *trivium*, which consisted of grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric, and the higher, known as the *quadrivium*, which encompassed the mathematical sciences. The latter was then above all a science of numerical relationships and therefore included arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

The disciplines of the *quadrivium* led up to the study of philosophy, the logical foundations of which were set forth in dialectics, the second subject of the *trivium*. The most popular textbook on dialectics was Porphyry's *Introduction* to Aristotle's *Categoriae*, translated into Latin by Marius Victorinus and later by Boethius.

To be sure, the disciplines could vary. Varro, for example, who produced a fundamental treatise on school sciences in the 1st century B. C., also listed architecture, medicine and philosophy. Quintilian, on the other hand, dropped dialectics and arithmetic. But by the 5th century the canon of the seven liberal arts took deep root in the East as well as the West. All the educators after Martianus Capella, followed his guidelines most faithfully. True, Boethius wrote exclusively on the *quadrivium*, but Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville gave its due to the *trivium* as well.

Despite Christianity's ideological and political victory, evidence that has come down to us shows that a pupil who attended school in the West in the 5th and early 6th centuries received practically the same instruction as the pupil of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. He, too, read and interpreted antique writers, and he, too, worshipped Homer and Virgil, Plato and Cicero.

Magnus Felix Ennodius, bishop of Pavia, who headed one of the finest schools of his time in the early 6th century, declared, like the educators of previous centuries, that rhetoric was the first of the arts that gave power to rule the world. He also maintained (at that time of barba-

risation) that learnedness enhanced the sparkle of noble birth.

But while the general approach remained the same, teaching standards were dropping. The *Introductio Arithmetica* of Nicomachus (of Gerasa) was being replaced by dry breviaries and still drier scripts. So was Euclid's famous *Elements*. The school concentrated on cramming. The art of interpretation and commenting was increasingly giving place to plain repetition, while eloquence and rhetoric, emasculated and formalised to the extreme, was mainly illustrative. It suggested the museum, because in practice the need for defensive or accusatory orations composed on the Roman model had long since dropped away, as did the need for refined gesturing and elocution. Church sermons were gaining ground. Though, to be sure, whether deliberately or not, they tended to follow the rules of Roman eloquence. Inevitably so. Because, in substance, the vast majority of prelates had graduated from the old school of rhetoric. This was true of Tertullian, the unbending foe and accuser of paganism, and of Augustine, the founder of the medieval world outlook. And St. Jerome saw in a nightmare that the celestial judge had accused him of being a Ciceronian rather than a Christian. In one of his treatises, which he addressed to Tyrannius Rufinus, a former friend and subsequent bitter enemy, Jerome wondered if one could forget what one had learned in childhood. His reply was negative, though he swore that on leaving school he had never picked up any of the lay writers he had studied there.

The school was the irreparable breach through which paganism reached into the Christian culture. It was the vehicle of the continuity that linked the one with the other. Christian schools would come into being later (though a few did exist already in the 4th and 5th centuries). But they, too, inherited many of the features of the Roman school. They were, indeed, modelled on them, though some of the ancient poets and philosophers were dropped (but not completely) by the Gospel and texts of the fathers of the church.

The schoolbook composed by Martianus Capella in the

5th century was a perfect illustration of the problems that typified the period of passage from Antiquity to the medieval times. Capella had been born in Carthage. In the 3rd to 5th centuries, Africa was in fact a breeding place for men of philosophical and rhetoric merit. They flourished on pagan, as well as Christian, soil. Among them was Plotinus, the first Neoplatonist, and his disciple Porphyry, the philosopher Macrobius, the Christian apologists Tertullian and Lactantius, and, last but not least, Aurelius Augustinus whom we have here named Augustine. This was not a mere twist of fortune. Northern Africa was at that time the centre of Greco-Roman learning. It had a ramified set of well-run schools of rhetoric, which kept on functioning despite the numerous social cataclysms, the invasion of the Vandals, and the endless theological strife. Study of Greek continued in the African schools, while in the empire's western provinces it had been almost entirely dropped. And the taste for philosophical knowledge prevailed for years and years. The standard of rhetoric instruction was still of the highest.

Active in the first half of the 5th century, Capella was a pagan rhetorician, and also a practising jurist. But quite clearly, his first love was education. His chief work, an allegory in prose and verse, entitled *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, was of an unmistakably didactic nature. Addressing it to his son, Capella evidently followed Cicero's example, who had addressed his treatise, *De Officiis*, to his son Marcus.

*De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* was in the fullest sense an *enkýklios paidéja*, that is, a teaching aid. This genre was fairly widespread in Greek, and especially Roman, literature. For his model, Capella had chosen Varro's *Disciplinae* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. But Capella introduced allegory into the fabric of his treatise, bringing it abreast of the times and delighting his medieval admirers.

The plot of Capella's treatise was dramatised. Jupiter's magnificent palace and the Milky Way were in an uproar. Mercury, patron of learning (*ratio* had in the traditional Roman sense), made up his mind to marry. At first,

he rashly sought the hand of Sophia (Wisdom), then the hand of Psyche (the Soul), but was turned down. No marriage was possible between them because of a contrary "spiritual make-up". Apollo, god of light and reason, called the unhappy groom's attention to the beautiful Philologia, who, he said, would give Mercury brilliance and bliss. The intelligence, learning and beauty of Philologia, who embodied humanitarian knowledge (in the broad sense), would combine splendidly with Mercury's various virtues, auguring a lasting and fruitful marriage. An assembly of gods, introduced at length and graced by the presence of Fortune, Health and Benevolence, and various other allegorical virtues, arrived at the conclusion that Apollo's suggestion was most sensible. Jupiter blessed the marriage in efflorescent verse, and preparations began for the nuptials under the direction of Phronesia (Reason), Philologia's mother.

But the bride hesitated. A truly wise maid and a lover of learning (as her name indicated), she turned to celestial and numerical symbols for advice. The numbers confirmed the propitious choice of Mercury, and Philologia consented to become his bride, for their marriage would help harmonise the world. Accompanied by the Virtues, Philologia appeared before her bridegroom and guests. She was surrounded by the Muses, each of whom dispensed upon her as gifts various special abilities. These gifts were accompanied by versified silver-tongued addresses.

Thereupon, the conversation was joined by the virtuous Prudentia, Justitia, and others. The Charites, too, bestowed their benevolence on Philologia, granting her added grace and beauty. Then, all together, they sang the praises of the bride. A lady of royal appearance came into the picture. She was Immortality (Athanasia), who intended to introduce Philologia to the society of gods. But before this, Philologia had to be purified. Quite unambiguously. She opened her mouth and expelled a whole library of treatises from her chest, supported in this by the virtues Work, Modesty, Concord, and Piety. Then she drank from the cup of immortality offered her by Apo-

theosis, the mother of Athanasia, and finally ascended to Jupiter's palace. Numerous pagan gods and goddesses passed before her in quick succession.

Apollo continued as patron of Philologia. He attached to her seven handmaidens, the seven liberal arts: Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy, and Music. Each set forth its substance. These expositions comprised an encyclopaedia of school learning, which became the most popular textbook in West European medieval schools.

Capella's textbook contained the modicum of learning that every student of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* was expected to assimilate. The "scientific" part of the book was also filled with allegories and interpretations. This made it one of the main sources of that medieval art alongside the writings of Macrobius and Boethius. To be sure, Capella's allegories betrayed a certain influence of Apuleius, a Roman writer who had a predilection for mystic religious allegories with erotic overtones.

Capella began his exposition of the sciences with an examination of grammar, which afforded the due form to the liberal arts and constituted their foundation. This fundamental significance was ascribed to grammar by Plato (in his dialogue *Philebus*), and later by Cicero, Tacitus, and Servius. By Capella's time the view was hallowed by a tradition of many centuries.

After an elaborate eulogy to grammar, Capella launched into the how and wherefore of studying it. By definition, it amounted to learning reading and writing. In a broader sense, he added, grammar taught the pupil to think and verify.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, Capella treated grammar as philosophy was usually treated: he divided it into active and contemplative: it was active when it concerned reading and writing, and passive when it meant reflection and evaluation.

Grammar consisted of four parts: *literae*, *literaturae*, *literatus*, and *literate*. The first was what had to be studied; the second that which used the first and was by definition the general subject, that is, learning how to write;

the third was acquisition of literacy, and the fourth apprehension of the true sense of what was written.

The letters out of which words were composed were of a dual nature. They were natural when pronounced and artificial when written. Capella dealt at some length with how letters should be pronounced, thus handing down to future generations the sound of the "classic" Latin language, which would soon be ousted by local dialects. He examined the composition of syllables, long and short, their connection within words, and the stresses — both the constant and those that shifted from one syllable to another when the word was altered.

A short rendering was given of how nouns were declined, accompanied by an explanation of the nature of verbs, adverbs, participles, prepositions, and the ways of inflecting words in sentences.

In the verse that opened the book on dialectics, Capella referred to the merits in that field of Aristotle and the Stoics, notably Chrysippus and Carneades. He exclaimed pathetically that dialectics was conceived in the mansions of the gods, and that Jupiter took guidance from it in order to judge correctly.<sup>3</sup> It was studied in Egypt and Attica. And Socrates and Plato had paid tribute to it.

Varro in Rome, Capella noted, took guardianship over that fine lady Dialectics out of Aristotle's hands. The above showed that Capella treated dialectics in a school context, and not as a philosophy or department of philosophy. Study of dialectics was for him study of the sequence of words conforming with the nature of things, showing what sequence was foreign to any given reality and what sequence was not. Dialectics was for him information about substance, quality, quantity, conformance, ratio, place, time, position, state, action, and suffering. Capella listed the ten Aristotelian classes of predicates, and pointed out that dialectics was also a guide to the correct composition of an affirmation or negation, that is, to the conduct of a dispute.

All Latin authors who would write on dialectics after Capella and until the end of the Middle Ages would repeat this statement verbatim or with only slight altera-

tions. Capella passed down to them a school attitude to dialectics, creating the respect for it that paved the way for the advancement of medieval scholasticism.

Two other functions of dialectics connected it closely with rhetoric: it showed how to construct sentences and statements, and how to find the best way of expressing a thought, affirmation or negation. The fourth function was from the realm of logic: dialectics showed how a general conception was correctly constructed out of syllogisms and other logical figures, producing a rational sequence of words and notions.

Capella defined genus as a sum of many forms in one name, such as "animal", for example, which could stand for a human being or a horse or any other living creature.<sup>4</sup> He identified species and form. Yet form was subordinate to genus and was the latter's specific expression. Capella went on to describe distinction, accident, generic meaning, definition, and the like. He touched on these notions in passing, however, and did not go into their substance. All he offered, in fact, was a general definition. He did the same with the notions of universality, integrity, and part (to which he devoted one phrase only), and with the division of the subject under discussion, singling out individualised aspects of the examination as the seeker came closer and closer to the truth.

Six small parts of the book examined and explained notions and showed how they were clad in words. They showed how one and the same word might be used to denote different things and, conversely, how one and the same thing might have different words to identify it, and so on. Capella described the aggregate of apprehended things as substance or primary matter, while their individualised manifestations were the second substance. He linked quality with the shape of a thing, adding that it might be of different degrees of perfection. Quantity could be discrete or extensive: the former in the case of numbers and words, and the latter in lines and time.

Capella noted that the category of ratio was important to any dialectical thought construction, because the correlation of things or notions laid the ground for true



knowledge. He set forth the logical principles governing the construction of a proposition, the theory of syllogisms, in most concise terms but so clearly that no complicated philosophical examples were needed.

Rhetoric was the last of the *trivium* of sciences. Capella likened it to the sound of trumpets and ritual song. It held a special place in the Greco-Roman culture, which had been oral rather than written, the cultural sphere being above all a sphere of the eloquent word. Rhetoric was also a repository of the cultural tradition, for it was the art of speaking effectively in public and, after Cicero, also the art of writing effectively. It was a methodical study of expressing ideas or evaluating a political situation, and, finally, or depicting the movements of the soul. Small wonder, indeed, that Christianity had less trouble jettisoning pagan philosophy than pagan rhetoric. The works of the church fathers abounded in rhetorical periods, and the writers of the Middle Ages, like the 12th-century amateurs of Antiquity, indulged in the use of familiar passages, word combinations, and turns of phrase that were typically Ciceronian.

As we see from Capella's treatise, he was no admirer of live eloquence, but rather of the dogmatic school of rhetoric, though he did admit that its function was to assure appropriate and convincing speech, as did Cicero, who, as we know, was a devotee of eloquence that served public needs.

The antique rhetorician dealt with two large groups of basic material: concrete matters (*causae*) and general issues (*quaestiones*). Capella discussed mainly the second group, shifting the centre of gravity to a strictly "theoretical" sphere. He assumed that questions of rhetoric could be finite and infinite, dealing with some specific point or a universal problem.

A rhetorical elaboration of a speech consisted of five parts: the inventory of the subject at hand (*inventio*), the structural disposition (*dispositio*), the verbal expression (*elocutio*), memorisation (*memoria*), and delivery (*pronuntiatio*). When constructing a speech one should devote more attention to the fundamental rather than secondary

issues. Capella offered a classification of matters and listeners strictly according to Cicero, and in particular Cicero's speech in defence of Milo, the murderer of the tribune Clodius.

He subdivided a speech into several main parts according to school tradition: introduction (*exordium*), narration (*narratio*), exposition (*tractatio*), which consisted of specific propositions (*propositio*), divisions (*partitio*), and proofs (*argumentatio*), and a conclusion (*conclusio*). It should repose on carefully selected material, showing the intrinsic substance and external points of the case. The subject should be comprehensibly defined in the introduction. The lexical fabric, whether oral or written, should be composed with special care. It should be correct grammatically, clear, apt, and sufficiently ornate, that is, it should be harmonious and expressive. One should not forget that the language should be pure, that all words should be carefully chosen and correctly arranged, and that the sentence should be thoughtfully constructed.

To attain the requisite standard, one should use figures of speech and the special turns of phrases that abounded in school rhetoric. A distinction should be made between figures of thought and figures of speech. The former included the rhetoric question, exclamation, and address, while the latter included repetition, the anaphora, and so on.

Despite its brevity, Capella's treatise gave the medieval student a fairly good idea of the basics of antique rhetoric, for it was presented as a thoroughly considered system. But Capella revealed all the faults of the school course of rhetoric, and did so most unmistakeably. The school course had become obsolete. It was stiffly centred on a selection of unchanging stereotypes and completely divorced from the realities not only of life in general, but particularly from intellectual life. To be sure, that fault was a merit on some occasions, showing that rhetoric was obstinately alive and adaptable (though immutable) to other historical and cultural conditions.

On completing the course of rhetoric, the student who sought knowledge, ascended one more rung of the ladder and tackled the mathematical sciences. But the modern

reader would look in vain for the now habitual rules and exercises in the arithmetic or geometry textbooks of those days. The practical part was simply non-existent. Besides, the subject matter was not entirely the same as now. The course of mathematics usually opened with an exposition of arithmetic (this sequence was introduced by Plato, who held that arithmetic helped train thinking and the ability to perceive the truth).

Capella, however, went against this order. He began his account with geometry. Possibly, because a personified Geometry had endeavoured to capture Mercury's attention and convince him of her usefulness in architecture (e.g., for building the legendary Labyrinth), sculpture, various spatial measurements, astronomy, and so on.

Before going on to an exposition of geometry proper, Geometry discoursed on the shape of the Earth, and stressed that the planet was not flat but round and spherical. Take special note of this. As you see, a pupil of a medieval school must have known that the Earth was a sphere. This wipes out the impression that until the very end of the Middle Ages people thought the Earth flat, resting on the backs of three leviathans, or elephants, or other such. Mind you, Capella referred to Anaxagoras, the ancient Greek philosopher, whose doctrine contained no few conjectures of genius and who was the first to establish a correct theory of solar and lunar eclipses.

According to Capella, the spherical Earth lay at the center of the world (a view widespread in all antique science). The Earth was washed by the Ocean, which divided it into the upper and lower hemispheres. Also, the world was divided into five zones, each for a specific population. People, for example, occupied land, which was best suited for their life. The southern hemisphere, Capella figured, was inhabited by antipodes who marched about upside down. The Earth was the centre. Round it revolved the celestial sphere and the constellations that had their fixed places.

The Earth consisted of land and sea, which formed a peculiar aquatic system. Capella followed tradition and divided the Earth into the three parts known in his

time — Europe, Asia, and Africa. He described Europe at length, starting with its south-western extremity, Spain, naming the cities of the Spanish province, including Carthage, the city in Northern Africa that belonged to that province. He offered a depiction of the Pyrenees and of Narbonne province. Then came a description of Italy, followed by accounts of the legendary founders of Italian cities, a list of the islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea, the four promontories whereby Europe thrust into seas and oceans, and brief notes on Thessaly, Macedonia, Thrace, and Africa (its coast and the interior up to the Niger River). When describing the population of Africa, Capella did not hesitate to list the legends about the atlantes, troglodytes, monsters and non-people.

Capella thought Egypt was the summit of Asia, adjoined by Arabia and Syria. This was followed by a depiction of Phrygia, Cappadocia, Assyria, and Persia, an astonishing hodge-podge of fact and fantasy. His description of India was nothing short of strange, with an accent on information derived from legends about the campaigns of Alexander the Great. A short piece was devoted to Babylonia. In sum, the bulk of Capella's sixth book referred to the province of geography rather than geometry. Still, following Capella's example, who had not himself invented this approach either and merely copied the presentation that was usual for the Roman school, the predominance of geography in the course on geometry became the rule in medieval schools as well. Only the last section of the sixth book dealt with geometric figures. In substance, it was a precis of Euclid's *Elements*. All Capella offered were definitions of the point, line, angle, and of plane and dimensional figures.

Geometry was followed by Arithmetic. The latter was obviously accepted by the gods, Capella said, for all of them welcomed her warmly. The description of Arithmetic began with an account of the unit (monad), which was the beginning of numerals. It was also the symbol of one God, one World, one Sun, and one Moon. Thereupon, Capella discussed all numerals up to ten in the same spirit. He defined the numerals, even and odd, and the no-

tion of plain and compound numbers, and finite and infinite numbers.

Setting forth the theory of geometric numbers, Capella identified numerals with geometric figures. This was something that went back to the Pythagoreans and Plato. Capella spoke but vaguely about the increase and decrease of numbers, and separation of the part from the whole. He offered no recommendations, so that the student would hardly be able to learn how to deal with numbers.

The appearance of Astronomy excited all the other attending gods. Stressing the old age and significance of that science, Capella set out to describe the concept of the world reposing on an eclectic foundation. According to Capella, it consisted of four elements. It was spherical in shape, and within that sphere was the Earth. The Earth was surrounded by the sky, which consisted of air and flaming ether.

The Sun, Moon and the Stars moved within their circular orbits, which were in some manner attached to the celestial sphere. Capella gave a detailed description of the circles in the celestial sphere, and told us what constellations they ran through, and the space that lay between them. He listed the constellations, tried to relate them to each other, but was not inclined to create a map of the stellar sky.

The description of planets was given in a special section. Capella maintained that the Earth was not the centre of the rotation of all planets, namely Venus and Mercury, which revolved directly around the Sun. Capella also described the Moon, its movements, eclipses, and correlated the rotation of the Sun with the Moon's movement through the Zodiacal belt and constellations.

Surprisingly, Capella did not refer at all to astrological topics in the book on astronomy, though that would have been highly popular in his time. But, evidently, he did not think it essential at the time to include it in the school curriculum.

A book on music completed Capella's treatise on education. The immediate exposition of the subject was pre-

ceded by an ornate prologue in which all the characters of Capella's treatise took part. Allegorical persons made speeches, sang, and played musical instruments, until at last Harmony introduced some semblance of order in this phantasmal cacophony.

Harmony declared that the prime purpose of music was to perfect the art of modulation and agreement of sounds, and to instil the right rhythm. Though Capella spoke of three types of music — the sort that sounded (i. e. music itself), rhythmic music (as in numbers), and metric (as in words), and though he did note the significance of harmony as the element that introduced order in the world, his statements to that effect sounded incidental. In substance, Capella spelled out the elements of the music that sounded. This was not entirely in character for antique theorists, who considered music chiefly a theory and laid great store by what they termed world music.

That was the scheme worked out by Boethius in the early 6th century, who left us a textbook treated as classic in the Middle Ages. In Capella's case we learned of tone, chord, and modality. To rhythmic modalities he devoted a special section, as he also did to meter. But all the information was given superficially, without a close look into the subject. As a result, the book was inconclusive, and was never, in fact, appreciated by people in the Middle Ages.

Not only did Capella make use of Greek terms, but he also referred to Greek philosophers, scholars and poets, such as Aristotle, Chrysippus and Carneades in dialectics, Demosthenes in rhetoric, Archimedes and Euclid in geometry, and Pythagoras in arithmetic. He referred once again to Pythagoras in astronomy, along with Plato, Eratosthenes, Ptolemy and Hipparchus. In the book on music were the names of Orpheus, Amphion and Arion. There were also references to Linus, Homer, Aristoxenus, Heraclitus, Thales, and Democritus. Some of the wiser sages and poets Capella placed among the gods. He struck upon the idea of an "intellectual paradise", which subsequently captivated Dante Alighieri. Though Capella retraced the road travelled by Cicero, Varro, and Quin-

tilian, one did not get the feeling of a sound classic culture behind the lines of his *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. This became doubly clear when compared with even the writings of Macrobius and Boethius, who were close to being Capella's contemporaries.

Capella's treatise conveyed a fairly meagre sum of knowledge. But its importance was that this knowledge was the same for Antiquity and the Middle Ages. What we sometimes consider medieval ignorance was in fact taken from schoolbooks of late Antiquity, and was evidence of a certain resemblance between the world outlooks of those two eras.

This was borne out by the sustained popularity of Martianus Capella's treatise in the nearly eight centuries after its writing. We can easily spot his influence on the works of Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, and the writers of the Carolingian Renaissance. Capella was, indeed, one of the first to be translated into the then newly burgeoning German language. This was done by Notker, called Labeo or thick-lipped, at the turn of the 10th into the 11th century. The first printed edition of *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* came out at the end of the 15th century (1499), while the young Hugo Crotius, a philosopher of later fame, published it in Leiden in 1599, seeing it as a source of useful information.

The fancy mannerisms of Capella the rhetorician struck a chord of appreciation in the hearts of the European writers of the 17th century. As the 17th turned into the 18th century Capella's treatise was to have been specially published for the French dauphin's edification, but the great Leibniz, who was to have supervised its publication, failed to do so for some unknown reason.

It was to a fairly great extent under Capella's influence that the medieval educational system acquired the shape in which it thereupon abided for nearly a thousand years: the first grade or *trivium* encompassed a certain amount of humanitarian knowledge, including reading and writing, partly counting, and the rudiments of eloquence or rhetoric, and the *quadrivium*, which encompassed the mathematical sciences, whose number was reduced to four. By

contrast, we may recall that in Roman schools the obligatory curriculum was also liable to embrace medicine, jurisprudence, and some other disciplines.

The order of instruction worked out by Capella became standard in medieval schools and the "lower" departments, known as arts departments, of universities. Grammar was the basic subject and covered study of the alphabet, pronunciation and writing, the parts of speech, and interpretation of the content and form of literary works.

The book on dialectics (logic) contained an account of Aristotle's categories. It showed the art of constructing logical arguments, of conducting a debate. The part on rhetoric gave instructions in the art of speaking, composing Latin verse and prose, and contained some elements of law. Arithmetic demonstrated computation and gave an idea of the allegorical interpretation of numbers and proportions. Geometry set forth some of Euclid's ideas and the rudiments of geography, medicine and other natural sciences. Music was a difficult theoretical subject which dealt with world harmony, all its types and manifestations, and in passing also with sound music. Astronomy provided an idea about the structure of the firmament. Furthermore, this set of school subjects was crowned with a course in philosophy (in the Middle Ages replaced with theology).

Capella's unforgettable allegories exercised a strong influence on the medieval concept that the sciences were the handmaidens of theology. For in his treatise, in fact, people first saw the school subjects in the personified garb of the serving girls of Philology (love of science and scholarship).

In the Middle Ages, it is true, the serving girls replaced their mistress, whose place was taken by theology to suit the ideology of the epoch. But the functions of science remained essentially the same. It retained the status it had enjoyed in the school of late Antiquity.



*References*

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## **POLITICAL ZIGZAGS AND THE BEAUTY OF LOGIC**

In *Paradise*, Canto X, in the midst of twelve great sages, Dante Alighieri sang the praises of the sinless spirit who showed the speciousness of the world to those who listened. The lines were dedicated to Boethius, a man who had lived an astonishing and tragic life, one of the Last of the Romans who has gone down in memory as one of the most revered medieval teachers.

His writings were the foundation on which reposed medieval philosophy, education, literature, and theory of music. Small wonder that in the polemics marking the emergence of the European medieval culture, scholars asked themselves, "Augustine or Boethius?" By so doing they seemed to equate the significance for the cultural and ideological synthesis of the feudal epoch of the greatest of Christian theologians Augustine, recognised as the founder of the medieval world outlook, and that of the thinker Boethius, who stood at the culmination of the antique tradition.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born around A.D. 480, a most dramatic period for Western Europe. The day the boy-emperor Romulus Augustulus was deposed by Odoacer, the barbarian chief, with all the consequences this entailed, is usually considered the time Europe entered upon its medieval history. It was the culmination of several successive centuries of economic, politi-

cal and social disharmony, a time when a new social and economic system was coming into its own, along with a new type of culture. The life of Boethius was, in a way, set off by two occurrences that reflected the complexity and dynamism of that era. Soon after Boethius' birth, died Proclus (in A. D. 485), the last distinguished devotee of Neoplatonism and head of the school of Athens that had for a long time been the stronghold of the antique world outlook. And four years after Boethius' own death, in the spring of 529, Benedict of Nursia, founder of the oldest European monastic order, established the Abbey of Monte Cassino as the principal centre of the medieval Christian culture.

Cristianity had come out triumphant in the philosophical domain. Like the barbarians who had defeated the Romans but succumbed to the spell of the Roman political ideals (even though they interpreted them simplistically), the medieval thinkers, the Christian intellectuals, had consciously or not consciously referred to whatever had survived of Antiquity's spiritual legacy, seeking confirmation of their religious dogmas in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. It fell to Boethius' lot to participate in the crucial historical and cultural task of safeguarding and adapting the achievements of the antique thinkers to the new type of thinking congruent with the Christian tradition.

The reign of the Ostrogothic King Theodoric (493-526) was a time of relative economic and political stability in Italy. Having seized undivided power after assassinating his co-ruler Odoacer during a feast, the semi-literate king was eager to pass as a patron of the arts and sciences.

The antique legacy was still a living fact. In the political domain, this was seen in the survival of the Senate, of the system of Roman magistracies, and of the body of Roman legislation. In the cultural province, scholars were active in digesting and adapting to the needs of their time the thought material of Antiquity. The Latin element retained priority in the spiritual field. Intellectual pursuits were still largely the occupation of the Roman-Italian no-

bility. The Roman system of education was still functioning. Many of the philosophical, scientific and literary masterpieces of Antiquity were still in circulation. The spirit of the pagan times, so distinctly felt among the writers of the late 5th and early 6th centuries, was alive and throbbing, especially in the urban way of life despite the slow but sure growth of the influence of the church.

Many ancient edifices were restored in Theodoric's time, such as the Pompeius Amphitheatre; he repaved the roads of Ravenna and Verona: towns were adorned with statues; new buildings followed the Roman architectural model, and popular shows and circus performances, which had been a part of urban life in Antiquity, were revived. The musical arts thrived at Theodoric's court.

This period, which some call the Ostrogothic Renaissance, yielded a sparkling constellation of eminent men: philosopher, poet, scholar, and musician Boethius; writer, historian and magnificent Latin stylist Cassiodorus; historian Symmachus; rhetorician, educator, and writer of attractive secular verse Ennodius, and so on. As barbarians began to gain in scholarship, the educated class swelled. Procopius, a Byzantine historian, informs us, for example, that there were among the Goths "a certain Theodat, ... a man of advanced age, who knew Latin and who had studied Plato's philosophy". Those active in the cultural province had a solid stock of varied knowledge. Many of them were prominent administrative officials, many were active politicians. This, indeed, was typical of the Ostrogothic Italy — this congruence of cultural activity and political action seen above all in the fact that the authorities were deliberately seeking a Romano-barbarian synthesis, with cultural undertakings often being funded out of the royal treasury.

Though the influence of the Christian element tended to grow, it was still a long throw from its total supremacy. The cultural upswing was, moreover, greatly furthered by the close ties of Ostrogothic Italy with the Eastern Roman Empire.

Boethius was the most striking figure on the cultural scene of that period. His role in political affairs was no less

conspicuous. By birth he belonged among the top nobility of Rome, coming from the famous gentes of the Aniciuses and Manliuses, which had given the Roman Empire outstanding generals and distinguished statesmen. The Aniciuses were close to the Byzantine emperors. Since the time of Diocletian and until the final collapse of the Western Empire, the brilliance of that family was in the eyes of the people equal to that of the imperial throne. Besides, the Aniciuses were one of the richest Roman families. Boethius' father, also named Boethius, was consul and praetorian prefect, and his grandfather fought at the side of Flavius Aëtius, who defeated the Huns at Chalon. Both were later killed by mercenary assassins.

Boethius lost both his parents in early childhood, and was adopted by Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, the great-grandson of the Symmachus who had once pleaded for the restoration of the Victory Altar in the Curia Romana. Aurelius Memmius was reputed to be one of the most learned and virtuous men of his time. Cassiodorus, the king's chancellor, compared him to the legendary Cato, who was in Roman history the paragon of the loftiest civic virtues. Contemporaries saw the same noble spirit firing the breast of the great-grandson as had fired his ancestor.

Boethius was very fond of Symmachus, who had all his life been for him the ultimate authority in all matters. He considered Symmachus his father, and their bond of friendship and affection grew only stronger when the younger philosopher married Rustitiana, Symmachus' daughter.

Boethius received an excellent education. His learning was extraordinary; even at an early age he made his contemporaries marvel. Cassiodorus wrote: "You entered the school of the Athenians while far distant from them. To the circle of those wearing Greek *pallas* you added those clad in togas, so that the legacy of the Greeks became a Roman teaching. ...You have passed down to the descendants of Romulus all the marvellous things given the world by the heirs of Cecrops. The Italians owe it to you that they are learning in their own language the musician

Pythagoras and astronomer Ptolemy, that the sons of Ausonia hearken to the arithmetician Nicomachus and the geometrician Euclid, that the theologian Plato and the logician Aristotle hold their disputes in the dialect of the Quirinus, and that you returned Archimedes, the mechanic, to the Sicilians in the guise of a Roman. Whatever arts and sciences eloquent Greece may have created through the efforts of her sons, all were received by Rome out of your hands in its native tongue."<sup>1</sup>

At the age of twenty, Boethius had, indeed, produced his cycle of treatises on such school subjects as arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, demonstrating his extensive scholarship and the universality of his interests.

The years that followed Boethius devoted essentially to philosophical and logical search. He translated into Latin and wrote commentaries on a considerable part of Aristotle's *Organon*. But this was just a fragment of what he had set out to accomplish, namely, translating into Latin all the writings of Plato and Aristotle, and to write commentaries on them in order to show the intrinsic unity which he espied in what he thought to be the two greatest philosophical systems of Antiquity.

But Boethius was not too preoccupied with theoretical knowledge to neglect his many political duties at the court of King Theodoric. In fact, he confined his studies to just his leisure hours. And while he saw fit to harmonise the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle in the province of philosophy, his political aspirations were centred on tightening the union of the barbarians and the Roman world, and on harmonising that union by handing down to the Goths the Roman traditions of statehood.

Here he and Theodoric saw eye to eye. The king had at first made him treasurer of his kingdom, then first minister and leader of the Senate. In A. D. 522, he was granted the highest possible evidence of the king's grace; both of Boethius' sons, neither of whom had yet reached manhood, were elected consuls. Ravenna, the capital of the Ostrogothic kingdom, was jubilant. Crowds gathered at the city curia, where *magister officiorum* Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was delivering an eulogy in honour of

King Theodoric. After the ceremony, the king's first minister and a loving father, who was in perfect bliss, as he wrote in *Consolation*,<sup>2</sup> marched with his consul sons along the streets, surrounded by patricians and hailed by the people.

It seemed nothing was too precious for fortune to grant him. But soon everything changed. Within two years of the day of his triumph he was accused of treason. Here is how it happened. The king's consultant Cyprian showed the king a denunciation saying Senator Albinus was sending secret letters to the Byzantine emperor. The denunciation was examined by the Senate, which, however, had gathered not in Ravenna as usual, but in Verona, a city that Theodoric was especially fond of (for which reason he is known in Teutonic legend, namely the *Nibelungenlied*, as Dietrich von Bern, i. e. Theodoric of Verona).

The king had gone to Verona secretly, without letting Boethius, leader of the Senate, know about the assembly he had ordered there. But Boethius learned of it and went there posthaste to expose the slanderers and clear Albinus, who was a friend, of the false charges.

Counting on his prestige, he addressed the Senate and, among other things, made a magnanimous but unquestionably rash statement. He said if Albinus was guilty, then so was he, Boethius. He hoped evidently that this would show how ludicrous the charges were. But he discovered that recent hangers-on could not be relied upon: the Senate did not hesitate to charge Boethius along with Albinus, and added the charge of sacrilege.

Boethius was banished to Ticinum (now Pavia), where, languishing in gaol, he wrote a modest-sized treatise, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, that has immortalised his name. He was executed a few months later, either at the end of 524 or the beginning of 525. Thus, the medieval civilisation started in much the same way as the Roman: once, a Roman legionary had killed Archimedes, the eminent Greek scholar, in a street in Syracuse. Now, the club of a barbarian executioner cut short the life of one of the Last of the Romans. His remains are said to have first been buried in the cathedral Ticinum; whence they were

later moved to St. Peter's Cathedral in Celrodo, where a few centuries later, another great exile, Dante Alighieri, gazed sadly at his tomb.

Soon after Boethius, the king also executed his father-in-law, Symmachus. Pope John I, a close friend of Boethius, died in a mysterious way that suggested poisoning. Whereupon, in August 526, Theodoric himself departed this world, having, as Procopius would have us believe, repented his black deeds.

This dramatic succession of events, notably the execution of Boethius, was the effect of the erosion of the temporary and unsure alliance of the Goths and Romans. It would therefore be a mistake to trace the fall of Boethius to just his relationship with the king, even though towards the close of his life, Theodoric took off the mask of enlightened royalty. No longer was it for him a matter of prestige, but of how to keep his weakening grip on power. Towards the end, Theodoric, like Julius Caesar before him, became aware of the barrenness of his "gracious" policies. The disaffected Gothic nobles wished the Romans pushed out of the picture, and to lay their hands on the latter's land and wealth. They did not like the king's flirtations with the Roman nobility. The religious issues, too, were unresolved. The confrontation between the Catholic Romans and the Arian Goths was gaining in intensity. The Byzantine Empire viewed the fertile Italian soil with a greedy eye. So, Theodoric needed someone (whether guilty or not) on whom to blame his own setbacks.

Boethius seemed the most suitable figure. He would answer for everything — as first minister, as someone with a different culture and different mentality, someone not entirely comprehensible and therefore to be feared. As we see, Boethius was not wrong when he wrote in his *Consolation* that the main charge against him was his preoccupation with philosophy. Most certainly, Boethius was no martyr for the Catholic creed who fell at the hands of Gothic Arians. To begin with, Boethius' own attitude towards Christianity was nothing if not uncertain, as I shall try to show below. Besides, it was quite evident that even



at that stage Theodoric stuck to his policy of religious toleration.

Boethius' vivid life and tragic death laid the foundation for a legend. Not only was he forever an essential figure in the medieval history of literature and philosophy. His image and legend, like his writings, became for many centuries a stimulus for the development of West European medieval culture.

At the outset of his educational career, Boethius went about providing the system of education with philosophical backing. He occupied himself writing the requisite Latin textbooks, which summed up in comprehensible yet not over-simplistic form, the Greek achievements in arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. (Only two of his treatises of the schoolbook cycle are extant: *De Institutione Arithmetica* and *De Institutione Musica*.) It was clear to Boethius that culture had to have a lasting foundation of schooling and scholarship, without which philosophy was no more than a hollow word.

Boethius dedicated some of his writings to the upper grade of the Roman system of education, the mathematical sciences. Nor did he simply present them. First, he offered a theoretical grounding for the *quadrivium*. More, he was considered the first to use that term, which meant the fourfold gates of knowledge one had to pass on the way to mastering philosophy, the highest wisdom.

In his *Arithmetic*, Boethius suggested the term *quadrivium* as the analogue of "four roads" to knowledge or the "four methods" that occur in the writings of Nicomachus of Jersash (now Gerasa), whom Boethius refers to in his treatise.

Boethius invoked Pythagoras and his disciples to back up the need for learning the *quadrivium*. "The men of ancient times who prospered under the guidance of Pythagoras in pure rational contemplation," he wrote, "determined beyond question that it was quite impossible to attain perfection in philosophy until you mastered that most noble grade of knowledge, the *quadrivium*".<sup>3</sup> The *quadrivium*, he maintained, sharpened the student's mind. That was the way to follow if you wished to proceed from

what man was given by his senses to the impeccable and infallible superior knowledge. The body of mathematics led the student from the province of changeable material things to the world of immutable and extemporal ideas. This ascent to superior knowledge Boethius conceived as a certain type of progression culminating in the unconditional liberation of the human intellect from corporeal sensations attuning him to absorb the truth.

The mathematical sciences had a purifying effect on the soul and reason, releasing them from the dungeon of corporeal perception (Plato's idea), yielding insight and keenness. But to have the greatest possible purifying effect, there had to be a definite sequence. Like Plato, Boethius held that it was best to begin by studying arithmetic, because "it obviously forces the soul to use thought for the attainment of the truth".<sup>4</sup> Geometry's turn was next, for it could carry the soul to the truth and help develop a philosophical way of thinking. Music came third, because its students sought to express consonance through numbers. Last in line stood astronomy: it forced the soul to gaze upwards, leading from the Earth to Heaven.

This sequence was at odds with that of Martianus Capella. But sequence seemed most important to Boethius, because only the aggregate of mathematical disciplines could lead to the desired goal. As a teacher, he naturally saw the value of each discipline in its own right, but their significance as a body, and gradualness and method in teaching them, were to him crucial. The main purpose of the *quadrivium* was to prepare the student for philosophy, whereas the specific and immediate purpose of mathematics was to pick up the aspects and functions of the "power of numbers".

"Everything created out of the original nature of things appears as a formal set of numbers,"<sup>5</sup> Boethius maintained. In other words, a number was at the root of the world, and that number was in God's intellect. But the purpose of mathematics was to learn numbers in the "scientific sense". Arithmetic dealt with numbers as such; numbers related to space were the subject of geometry; music yielded knowledge of numbers that were at the

basis of harmonious modulation, and in astronomy the student learned numbers that expressed the motion of celestial bodies.

Nothing could teach the mind more thoroughly to engage in strictly arranged intellectual activity than study of numbers. Because mathematics taught the student to think methodically, that is, in the requisite order.

Anyone with a "mathematical" education, Boethius held, was trained enough to tackle philosophy, that one and only true science. Arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy were to him nothing but disciplines, not a science in its own right.

The content of learning took a back seat to system. Quite in the spirit of the burgeoning cultural era, Boethius assumed that it was more important to teach people to think in a strictly determined direction than to supply them with a diversity of unorganised information.

He defined the task of enlightenment in a purely secular framework. Not even a hint is to be found in his writings about tying in education with the Christian tradition. Comparing his writings of the "school cycle" with an analogous treatise, *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularum Litterarum*, written by Cassiodorus half a century after Boethius' *Arithmetic* and *Music*, one will see that Cassiodorus defined the essence of education quite differently: for him the source of all secular science was the Revelation. It followed that secular science did not contradict the Revelation, that it was knowable. As Cassiodorus saw it, science could only buttress the Christian faith. Only a few dozen years lay between the works of Boethius and Cassiodorus, but how different their basic principles!

As a thinker "who has been brought up in Eleatical and Academical studies",<sup>6</sup> as Boethius described himself, he could not fail to see that he needed an adequate philosophical vocabulary to give substance to the incipient new style of thinking and philosophising. What he needed were Latin equivalents of the principal notions and terms of Greek philosophy.

As he approached the zenith of his life, Boethius set himself a goal that was as imposing as it was hard to achieve; to translate into Latin all the works of Plato and Aristotle, and to show the deep-going unity of those two greatest scholars in Greek philosophy. And, moreover, to supply them with appropriate commentaries.

Boethius wrote: "All the subtleties of Aristotle's art of logic, all the moral significance of his philosophy, all the boldness of his physics, I shall convey after setting his writing into due order—translate and supply with my own explications. More, I shall translate and comment on all the dialogues of Plato. After accomplishing this, I will do my best to present the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato in a certain harmony, and show that most people are wrong in thinking that these philosophers were at odds in all matters. On the contrary, in most topics, those that were the most important, they were in accord. These tasks I shall carry into effect with great benefit and ceaseless labour, provided I am given a long enough period of years and enough free time."<sup>7</sup>

Plato and Aristotle were the two men who determined the future paths of European culture. Recall Raphael's famous fresco, "The School of Athens". It portrays the famous Greek thinkers. At its centre slashing space, as it were, and concentrating it at the same time, we see Plato and Aristotle straining towards us. Magnificent, noble, an old man who resembles a late portrait of Leonardo da Vinci, Plato pointing to the heavens. Aristotle, hirsute and black-bearded, strides powerfully and confidently, and points his hand most determinately at the ground beneath him. That was how Raphael, that great Renaissance artist, depicted the substance of Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines as understood by people of his time.

Plato's philosophy abounded in the ideatic and divine. Aristotle's was realistic, touchable, with knowledge of the Earth and earth-bound man contrasting Plato's knowledge of heaven and the supreme subsistences. The codex that Plato holds in his hand is inscribed "Timaeus", which is the title of the "loftiest" of his dialogues about the arrangements of the universe. The folio we see in Aris-

totle's hand is *Ethics*, which symbolises his teaching of man and morality held in high esteem during the Renaissance.

In short, do Plato and Aristotle stand for the celestial and the mundane, respectively? The spiritual and the material? This notion is so imperturbably lasting that it has become banal. The paradox of the ordinary consciousness and of widespread notions is that, though tenacious, they are often far removed from the truth. But turning from widespread notions to the history of philosophy, a far stricter judge, we will find the same contraposition of Plato and Aristotle. The history of their complicated relationship, interpreted and reinterpreted many many times over, seems to have given grounds for this. For had not Aristotle finally forsaken the Academy, where he was reared but where Plato reigned undivided. Had he not, thereupon, founded his own school, the Lyceum, which was at once similar and not similar to the Academy. The writings, the doctrines, and especially the fate of these doctrines down the ages, say incomparably more about the resemblance or dissimilarity of the two thinkers than any collisions between them.

Many of their contemporaries saw "nobility" and restrictedness in Plato's doctrine in contrast to the "democracy" and "openness" of Aristotle's. But both these opinions belonged to the select. They were not the voice of the people, to whom both Plato and Aristotle were equally incomprehensible and, more often than not, simply unknown.

Late Antiquity, and thereupon also the Middle Ages, had distinguished between Plato the theologian and Aristotle the physicist. Until the 13th century, medieval philosophy bore predominantly Platonic hues, with the philosophical overturn of the late 12th and 13th centuries occurring under the colours of Aristotle.

Plato and Aristotle were the two towers which Western philosophical thought could not bypass in its further advance. The same is largely true of Eastern philosophical thought. The towers were often portrayed as opposites. In so doing, people seemed to forget that poles are at the

ends of one and the same axis, and that the axis is not simply a distance between them but also a pivot that connects them. From plunging into the inexplicable depths of Plato's divine mind, philosophy moved on to the study of being, of its finest features and the Aristotelian reason which apprehended it.

Despite their incontestable polarity, these sprouts had one and the same root. The Neoplatonists felt this most keenly. At the end of the 2nd and the early 3rd century, Ammonius (called Saccas, the sack bearer), the Alexandrian sage who imitated Socrates' lifestyle and who was teacher to Plotinus, founder of Neoplatonism, called attention to the common features of Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines, and saw this as the earnest of philosophy's further advance.

Neoplatonism was the last and the most all-embracing synthesis of antique philosophy. It did not confine itself to apprehending and expressing the last remaining secrets of being and divinity. It produced an astonishing alloy of refined mystique and razor-sharp logic that in its refinement excelled even the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. The Neoplatonist logicism could not get anywhere without Aristotle, and it is small wonder that Porphyry, the disciple of Plotinus, the man who systematised his teaching, author of the *Cave of Nymphs*, that classical model of the Neoplatonist interpretation of mythology, showed a special interest in Aristotle and wrote a large number of commentaries on Aristotle's writings.

The Alexandrian Neoplatonism, which gained repute for its logical, mathematical and natural science studies, was closely associated with Aristotle's dialectics. In Alexandria, Neoplatonists commented on Aristotle with all but the same care as on Plato. In their commentaries, however, Aristotle appeared mainly as a logician, and as such he would be known in Western Europe for something like the next ten centuries. While the Neoplatonist school in Athens, headed by Proclus, that last great thinker of Antiquity, produced the scripts of the works of Aristotle which were later used by Boethius.

The task that Boethius had set himself was of enormous

historical and cultural importance. It was also enormous in scale, and, if completed, would open up new horizons to European culture. Boethius was not simply an extensively educated man. He had not withdrawn into the ivory tower of his wide knowledge. He was neither only philosopher nor only scholar. He was also a conspicuous political and public figure, a man who could not fail to see that in the West cultural life was going to ruin. He was deeply aware that all corpus of Plato and all corpus of Aristotle had to be translated into Latin, because fewer and fewer people in the West were learning Greek, so that the wealth of Greek philosophy and science was out of their reach.

Boethius knew Greek well. If he had set himself a more egoistic goal, he could simply have written a few commentaries to the Greek texts. But Boethius' aim showed that he did not regard his philosophical activity as narrowly elitarian, and that he saw his task as one of enlightenment and culture, because it would put Plato and Aristotle within reach of the Latin-speaking world. Mind you, Boethius could not fail to see that Latin was also becoming a language of culture for Germans as well.

As Boethius conceived it, the works of Plato and Aristotle were to constitute the skeleton of the entire intellectual and cultural domain of the next epoch. It would not be a light construction. Nor would it be a foundation built of unmatching blocks. It would be a monolith of thought, knowledge, and method. The substantive singleness of the foundation would predetermine the firmness, elegance, and stability of the construction as a whole.

Boethius tackled the job in the early 6th century. With concern for the strength of the cultural foundation, he took pagan wisdom, not the Christian Revelation, as the point of departure. To be sure, he could have more simply followed Augustine, who had in his many works already outlined the boundaries of the Christian spiritual and intellectual universe. Augustine too, had at times treated both Plato and Aristotle not without sympathy, but would not for a minute coun-

tenance the idea that pagan wisdom should serve as the foundation for human culture. For to his mind, pagan wisdom could not be true.

His theological treatises show that Boethius held Augustine in high esteem. But in the choice of his life's aim he remained true to himself and to Philosophy, which he called a wet-nurse in his *Consolation*. This very manner of defining his task showed him to be in favour of comprehensible wisdom and against intellectual surrogates. And that is where Boethius stood high above his own time. Those who wanted to learn philosophy, he felt, should be given its purest and untainted models. That was why Plato and Aristotle had to begin speaking the language of Horace and Virgil.

It seems to me that Boethius was aware that translation was not merely a problem of knowledge and its dissemination and that it was also a problem of language in which this knowledge should be expressed and through which it could be preserved. After all, anything that is not adequately expressed does not, as it were, exist for others or, in any case, cannot be understood.

Boethius the philosopher wanted that "the complete authenticity of the translation should prevent the reader of philosophical books put out in Latin from having to turn to Greek books for elucidation".<sup>8</sup> This is no idle concern. Out of Plato's dialogues only *Timaeus* had been translated into Latin before Boethius (this was done by Neoplatonist Chalcidius). And *Timaeus* was Plato's only dialogue known textually in the early Middle Ages. Boethius discovered a number of Latin translators of Aristotle's works. He himself managed to translate a part of the *Organon*, a collection of Aristotle's writings on logic. He produced two versions of the translation of Aristotle's *Categoriae*, also probably two Latin versions of *De Interpretatione*, and Latin versions of *Analytica Priora* and *Analytica Posteriora*, *Sophistici Elenchi* and *Topica*.

Widely circulated in the early Middle Ages were Boethius' translations of, and commentaries on, *Categoriae* and *De Interpretatione*. These and Boethius' two commen-



taries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* to Aristotle's *Categoriae* (one was done by Boethius to a translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* by Marius Victorinus, and the other to his own translation thereof) made up the body of the so-called old logic (*logica vetus*), which influenced all logical topics in Western Europe until the 12th century, when the translations of the two *Analyticas*, and general versions of the *Topica* and the *Sophistici Elenchi* (proved to have been done by Boethius) became known. Peter Abelard, the most brilliant mind of the 12th century and effective champion of dialectics and free thought, confined himself to this "old logic". Nor did it recede to the background until new translations of Aristotle's writings on logic, done from Greek and Arabic, appeared in the 12th century. Still, Western Europe owes it to Boethius that he fertilised the ground for the assimilation there of Aristotle's logic and philosophy.

Aristotle was mainly a philosopher of the advanced Middle Ages. He did not have to be called by name, because he was the Philosopher.

Boethius did not translate Aristotle's other works or any of Plato's. As he had feared, he was not given the time. Death came in the flower of his life, and it would not be amiss to say that West European philosophy in the Middle Ages would have been a little different if Boethius had managed to complete his undertaking.

Why had that Last of the Romans begun by translating Aristotle's works on logic? Why did he not begin with Plato's dialogues, since all his own writings had a clearly Platonist orientation? And more, since at the end of his life he identified Plato's doctrine with Philosophy.

In the antique school, the study of philosophy (dialectics) usually began, and in most cases ended, with Aristotle's logic. The main textbooks were the *isagoges* to the *Categoriae* of Aristotle written by different authors, with the *Isagoge* by Neoplatonist Porphyry being the most widespread. So, Boethius did not even begin his undertaking by translating Aristotle's *Categoriae*, but by writing a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* as translated by Marius Victorinus.

The explanation that occurred more widely was that Boethius did not know Greek well enough when he tackled his life's work.

This may be so, though it does not dovetail with the assumption that he had received his education in Athens. To my mind, the reason is Boethius' attitude. He had always striven to go from the simple to the complex, never to leap across grades and always to direct his labours to a fairly broad audience. In this case, it appears, he had continued his "school" work, taking the next step after producing textbooks for the *quadrivium*. His concern for fundamental education, like his concern for the depth and solidity of the intellectual culture as a whole, prompted him to begin with the "basics of philosophy".

The deeper reason was Boethius' keen interest in philosophical method. He simply could not ignore that problem, which occupied a fairly prominent place in Antiquity's various philosophical currents. His "school" treatises betrayed his gravitation towards a near ascetic thought discipline. And Aristotle's writings on logic responded to this to the greatest degree.

That this was natural for Boethius is borne out by the fact that at about the same time as he worked on the translation of Aristotle and the pertinent commentaries, he endeavoured to apply the logical method to questions of Christian theology, thus anticipating a similar attempt by Thomas Aquinas seven and a half centuries later.

And one more reason why Boethius started with Aristotle. There was a need to work out a Latin philosophical vocabulary equivalent to the Greek. Quite a lot to that effect had been done by Cicero but, strictly speaking, Latin was a far from perfect philosophical language in Boethius' day. He could not fail to see that this was a grave obstacle to the development of a Latin-language philosophy. Because there can be no precise thinking without a precise terminology.

Here is what Boethius wrote on this score: "Reasoning is not the same as computation. If you compute correctly, whatever number you get will correspond exactly to what there is in reality. For example, if we get a hundred after

completing the computation, there will be exactly a hundred articles that we had counted. Reasoning, you cannot rely on such sameness. Not all things by far that can be identified by words, exist in actual nature.

"That was why anyone who set out to study the nature of things without priorly mastering the science of reasoning, would not escape mistakes. Because one could not attain undistorted and existing truths without first learning which conclusions led along the road of the truth and which were a mere likeness of the truth, without first learning which were incontestable, and which could not be relied upon."<sup>9</sup>

Boethius lived at a time when the West had little interest in logic and philosophy. The short interim that Theodoric's reign afforded between endless wars, hunger and ruin, had at best prompted cogitation about the soul or indulgence. In the schools, which still operated on the Roman model, logic remained an obligatory subject, a subject for cramming. In fact, it was for school students that Boethius translated the *Isagoge* on Aristotle's *Categoriae*, because the translation of Marius Victorinus did not meet Boethius' scientific and educational standards.

But Boethius could hardly have remained the top authority as regarded philosophical method until the time of Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury, when disputes about the role and significance of logic transcended schools and searched for an answer to the question of the freedom and possibilities of human thinking, if he had been no more than a transmitter of the restricted notions of a "school" logic. Although that task, too, held importance for the future of culture.

Porphry's *Isagoge* set forth the rudiments of logic and interpreted the "five sounds" of five logical concepts: genus, species, distinctive attribute, substantive attribute, and accidental attribute. Boethius, on the other hand, formulated universal (general) concepts which held a conspicuous place in medieval philosophy, becoming its bone of contention, a measure of verity, and a criterion for ideological appraisal. Depending on how a person interpreted these concepts, he could be declared a heretic,

and could forfeit not only his intellectual authority but even his status in society, and his freedom, too, as was the case, for example, with Peter Abelard. Less dramatically but no less thoroughly has the problem of general concepts been discussed by philosophers of modern times, who tried to overcome the contradictions of the scholastic method and define the place of general concepts in the system of rationalistic knowledge with more accuracy.

The problem of general concepts arose first in Plato's doctrine, wherein he insisted that ideas, that is, general concepts, possessed true being, whereas individual things, which appeared to people to really exist, did not, in fact, exist. The general, Plato said, "died" in individual, concrete things. Aristotle criticised Plato's conception, attributing importance to the fact that the general manifested itself only through the particular, which man apprehended through his sensory experience. In his *Isagoge* on Aristotle's *Categoriae*, Porphyry underlined the problem and enumerated the difficult questions.

In fact, every person had reason to ponder on the correlation of individual things and their general appellations by dint of his own experience. It was incontestable, for example, that each of the articles used by a specific person was individual in the sense that this person seated himself at a specific table, and donned a specific garb. But this did not prevent the word "table" and the word "garb" from standing not only for the table and garb used by that specific person, but also for whole classes of articles named tables and clothes in general. The appellations were then general concepts which reflected the essence of these articles, making them what they were.

These elementary examples from life showed that the general and particular were an indissoluble unity in people's minds. Indeed, we did not in our everyday life have much difficulty in distinguishing between particular things and phenomena, and their general appellations. We did well to see, however, what was a table in general, not this particular one, and if there was a general "table", where it was, and how it was related to all the particular tables. There was a problem here quite definitely. It was

no accident, after all, that people endeavoured to resolve it for all of 25 centuries, and have not, to this day, arrived at a full and conclusive answer. I might add that the problem regained its sharpness with the advancement of computer technologies. Because it turned out to be enormously difficult to teach an artificial intellect to distinguish between particular things and general concepts.

Boethius tried to come closer to the answer. He said that by nature genus came before species, and species related similarly to its own attributes. Because species followed from genera. It was equally obvious, he said, that species were by nature primary in relation to the particular things located below them. Here Boethius appeared to follow Aristotle, who described the road of knowledge as motion from the general to the concrete, with the general being primary in the process of thought. For Boethius, the general was primary in relation to the particular in the sphere of existence, with genera and species being primary by nature. In other words, it is safe to assume that for Boethius they stood before particular things not only in the process of thought but also, probably, ontologically. He offered us a splendid example of how Aristotle could be given a Platonist orientation by means of an almost word perfect paraphrase. With all due respect for Aristotle, and despite his wish to be impartial, the Roman philosopher was unable to conceal his sympathy for Plato.

Still, he examined several approaches to the problem of general concepts, and in so doing produced a formula that found favour among thinkers in the Middle Ages: general concepts existed "in relation to sensory things, but were apprehended outside the corporeal substance".<sup>10</sup>

If Boethius had wanted to offer a puzzle to philosophers of future generations, he could not have done better.

At the same time, the Last of the Romans held the potential of human knowledge in high esteem, and therefore referred to general concepts with a degree of vagueness that, in its way, offered the human intellect boundless opportunities for resolving the logical puzzle. Once the topic was offered, the medieval scholasticism applied itself to interpreting. Boethius, as we see, was not only the "father

of scholasticism", but also acted willy-nilly as a perfidious Sphinx, suggesting that posterity should guess what was unguessable.

Medieval philosophy suggested three guesses (with a multitude of marginal ones): the realists, who acknowledged the existence of realities that transcended thought, that is, ideal objects, or general concepts that did not depend on human experience and knowledge. Moderate realists tended to "disperse" general concepts; the latter, they held, possessed real existence, but manifested themselves through singular things. Nominalists, in opposition to the realists, denied any real existence of general concepts and considered them categories of human thought. The extreme Nominalists held that general concepts were mere sounds, not even appellations. The Conceptualists sought to reconcile the inimical positions, recognising that the common, the general concepts existed in things and, at the same time, were a reproduction in the mind of similar attributes enclosed in the particular.

The clash between Nominalists and Realists broke out with extraordinary force in the 11th century, and, it seems, continued unabated even in the concluding period of the Middle Ages. I cannot think of any medieval philosopher who had not in some measure been either Realist or Nominalist or Conceptualist, while at times gravitating successively in all three directions.

The highest synthesis of medieval philosophy, accomplished by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, reposed on a realistic foundation. Nominalism fed oppositional currents of scholasticism—it fed the theory of dual truth, and exercised a considerable influence on the advancement of logic and the natural sciences. This especially in the 14th and 15th centuries. Conceptualism was the basis of Peter Abelard's protest against the church in the 12th century; Abelard's *Dialectica* is, indeed, in its own way, a paraphrase of Boethius' writings on logic.

Despite the apparently abstract nature of the clash over general concepts, it strongly influenced intellectual life in the Middle Ages, leading to religious struggle. Because each concept led in its extreme version to nothing short of

heresy. Given all its spirituality, Spiritualism betrayed a tendency towards pantheism, eradicating the boundary between the Earth and God (as in the case of Johannes Scotus Erigena).

The dangerous spectre of Arius, the heretic, appeared to arise again, waving the colours of Realism. Nominalism, taken at its extreme, quite unexpectedly destroyed the unity of the Trinity, because each of the hypostases turned into God in his own right. (This was the argument that Bernard of Clairvaux seized upon against Peter Abelard.) And Conceptualism led, in the final analysis, to rationalism and public actions against the authority of the church.

Medieval philosophy owes its thoroughly considered terminology, not only that which was borrowed from Aristotle and Plato, but also newly coined, to none other than Boethius. Some fundamental terms, such as "universals", "division", and others, occurred for the first time in his writings.

Aside from his translations of, and commentaries on, Aristotle and Porphyry, Boethius contributed visibly to the makings of scholasticist philosophy with his own series of original works on logic, namely, *De Syllogismo Categorico*, *De Syllogismo Hypothetico*, *De Divisione*, *De Categoria Differentiae*, and lastly, his commentary on Cicero's *Topic*. They belonged among the basic texts on logic, and their scripts were widespread in West European libraries right up to the 16th century.

As a result, Boethius, who wrote for the school and promoted philosophical education, was at the source of an ideological struggle that lasted for a number of centuries and that he himself could not even have suspected. From facts of school and intellectual life that look anything but staggering and exclusive in our time, but facts that become milestones in Boethius' activity, threads stretch all across the subsequent history of culture and give it not only distinction, but also integrity.

The philosopher presents a model of scholasticist interpretation in his theological treatises. For years scholars cast doubt on their belonging to Boethius, but the direct

testimonial by Cassiodorus discovered by A. Holder put an end to all doubts. Cassiodorus' testimonial said so many words that Boethius had "written a book about the Holy Trinity, a few works on the question of dogmata, and a book against the Nestorians".<sup>11</sup> This confirmed the fact that Boethius was the author of at least some of them.

The thinkers of Antiquity did not suffer the agonising duality that the confrontation of faith and reason, Revelation and knowledge, typical of Christianity, had brought into the world. Despite their interest in divinity, the pagan philosophers, from Plato onward, each produced their own mythology, each elaborating a new philosophical concept of the supreme principle hitched to their doctrine of being and the Earth.

Though the concept of theology sprang up in Greek philosophy, that philosophy was foreign to any religious doctrine on the existence and realisation of God based on the divine Revelation as an aggregate of incontestable truths which "God passed on to humanity".

With its specific approach to conceptualisation, theology began to develop only after the inception of Christianity with its idea of a personal God and the existence of sacramental texts that were thought to have "recorded" God's Word, that is, the supreme truth to be acknowledged without proof or thought, through unconditional subordination to authority. But though the verity of the Revelation was not subject to doubt, it was exposed to it anyway from time to time. And the first five centuries A. D. bear this out most conclusively. Christianity consolidated itself not only in the clash with paganism, but also in a most ferocious doctrinal struggle for the recognition of the divine origin of certain texts and dogmata.

By the year 510, when Boethius began writing his theological treatises, that struggle was not over. The storm that raged over the Trinity, over the two subsistences of Christ, had not yet abated. The Mediterranean lands were still inundated with heresies of different kinds. And Boethius responded to the keenest issues of that struggle.

Behind all those dogmatic arguments there always stood the problem of the relation of faith to reason. None



of the Christian apologists, none of the fathers of the church, evaded it in their writings. Two ways of solving that problem came into evidence fairly soon, and were used right up to the spiritual secularisation of modern times: with Tatian and Tertullian asserting the primacy of faith over reason, and Justin and Clement of Alexandria casting about for ways of defusing, if not reconciling, the explosive combination of faith and reason. The latter would sometimes lead to heresy, to excessive delight in the eyes of the Orthodox over the potentialities of the human intellect, as was the case with Origen, who was seized by the idea of an all-embracing Christian synthesis of the world outlook.

Determining the relation of faith to reason, of the divine truth and that of humans, occupied an important place in the doctrine of Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus). It would be too much to say that this father of the church had settled the problem once and for all, and exclusively in favour of faith, while negating the significance of knowledge. In effect, Augustine offered a multiple view, recognising (up to a point) the prerogative of reason as a means that could consolidate faith, and at the same time ascribing importance to intuition, to the irrational aspects of faith.

In his theological treatises, Boethius called himself Augustine's pupil. Maybe he really did consider himself one, and for two reasons: first, in Boethius' time, Augustine was recognised as the highest authority of the Western church; the second reason was psychological. Though he lived in an era when compilation was the highest educational principle, Boethius picked only the finest examples: Cato and Brutus in politics, Plato and Aristotle in philosophy, Pythagoras and Nicomachus in mathematics, and Augustine in theology. And in so doing, he could not have failed to appreciate Augustine's significance not only as theologian, but also as philosopher, as politician, and, last but not least, as a person.

But to declare oneself someone's pupil, did not mean being one. Boethius picked topics for his theological treatises in the very midst of the ideological controversies — about

the Trinity, about the relation of the two subsistences of Christ, about substances that could be beneficial, and about the errors of the Eutychians and Nestorians. Yet he chose them not for writing apologies, but in order to "examine" them.

Three of his treatises are dedicated to people who were close to Boethius, namely to his father-in-law Symmachus and to Pope John I. He laid before them the fruits of his reflections, for in this particular case they were not meant for the public at large (unlike his writings on logic). Possibly, he was aware of his unusual approach to theological problems and may have feared the consequences. Indeed, Boethius wrote his theological treatises as no one had written on theology before, and as people would write only several centuries later. It was only natural, therefore, that he appealed for understanding to those who were closest to him, and were the most enlightened and educated. Judging from the fact that he pleaded to be understood in each of the treatises, and that he never again undertook to interpret the dogmata and, indeed, never again wrote about the Christian teaching, we may assume that he did not gain such understanding. The atmosphere in Rome did not make for sincerity and outspokenness. Boethius wrote powerfully, as a master of exposure. His writings were like those of the 18th-century Enlighteners. Take this description of intellectual dispute:

"You no doubt remember how, when the letter was read in the assembly, it was asserted that the Eutychians confess that Christ is formed from two natures but does not consist of them whereas Catholics admit both propositions, for among followers of the true Faith He is equally believed to be of two natures and in two natures... Personally, indeed, I had nothing more to contribute than the rest, in fact rather less than more. I, no more than the others, had any view about the question at issue, while my possible contribution was less by one thing, namely, the false assumption of a knowledge that I had not got. I was, I admit, much put out, and being overwhelmed by the mob of ignorant speakers, I held my peace, fearing lest

I should be rightly set down as insane if I held out for being sane among those madmen.”<sup>12</sup>

Even a cursory acquaintanceship with Boethius' treatises of this cycle are liable to make one wonder: by name they were theological but in subject matter, in approach and method, they were essentially dry and complicated works of logic. One cannot fail to recall Boethius' motto of keeping the mind “disciplined”. In these treatises, too, he expressed his intellectual preferences; “And so, as it is common in mathematics, and, for that matter, in other sciences, I have laid down definitions and rules according to which I shall develop all that follows.”<sup>13</sup> The “mathematical” approach, he added, should be backed by philosophical conceptualisation, and relevant expressions and definitions.

The pathos that imbued Boethius' theological treatises was not proof of his faith, but rather of his seeking to understand. To understand, however, meant taking logic as the foundation, and logic for Boethius was the logic of Aristotle—the Aristotle who became the supreme authority on logic in the 13th century after a tense and bitter ideological struggle. He was, however, anything but popular among Western apologists and fathers of the church of the 1st to 5th centuries. Though some of his tenets did penetrate the body of ideas of orthodox Christianity, the searching and “scientific” nature of his doctrine was more to the taste of heretics, who had indeed been the first to use the Aristotelian logical and metaphysical concepts. This was true, first of all, of the heresies that rejected the trinitarian concept, namely the 2nd-century Monarchianists, Theodosians, the followers of Paul and Lucian of Samosata, and lastly, the Arians.

True, Aristotelianism did gradually reach the thinking of orthodox Christians. Take “consubstantial”, a conspicuous term in the Christian faith. Does it not evoke Aristotelian associations? All in all, it was an infiltration, one that nobody was willing to acknowledge.

Boethius, on the other hand, made determined and unprecedented use of Aristotle's logic for the interpretation of the dogmata. He approached the matter from

a new angle that henceforth predominated in medieval scholasticism. His contemporary, Leontius of Byzantium, active in the East, was then introducing Aristotle's logic into orthodox theology much more cautiously. But that, too, was evidence that matters were coming to a head. In the Byzantine Empire, however, the problem was not entirely solved until John of Damascus came on the scene.

Certainly, Boethius must have been cognizant of these Aristotelian ventures. And what he did to the Aristotelian logic by introducing it into the realm of ideas and definitions that had been foreign to it before, speaks of his philosophical rather than theological orientation and his extraordinary intellectual perceptiveness. Because what he accomplished in the 6th century would be repeated on a new level of European thinking in the 13th. Orthodoxy and free thinking would come to grips over Aristotle's legacy, and Thomas Aquinas would erect a new Catholic theoretical system on the basis of an emasculated Aristotelianism, and Aristotle's doctrine as interpreted by that great Arab commentator, Averroës (ibn-Rushd), would become the foundation of a Latin Averroism, giving a start to the revival of scientific interest.

But back to Boethius. He held that the verities of the faith had to be backed by proofs of the intellect (*fidem si poterit rationem conjunge*). He was certain that the faith should not be simply accepted, but also understood. "For it has been wisely said," he wrote, "that it is a scholar's duty to formulate his belief about anything according to its real nature."<sup>14</sup>

This viewpoint was fraught with great dangers to the faith, because, as we know from history, the search for understanding God-given truths has often led to their negation.

Boethius the philosopher suggested delimiting the provinces of science and theology, for they differed not only in subject matter but also in the way of thinking. "Speculative science," he wrote, "may be divided into three kinds: Physics, Mathematics and Theology. Physics deals with motion ... for it is concerned with the forms of bodies together with their constituent matter. ... Mathematics

does not deal with motion and is not abstract ... for it investigates forms of bodies apart from matter, and therefore apart from movement. ... Theology does not deal with motion, and is abstract. ... In Physics, then, we are bound to use scientific, in Mathematics, systematical, in Theology, intellectual concepts." <sup>15</sup>

When looking for the truth, he wrote, it would be wrong to stoop to fantasy, as one should probe for the essence, and not so by the outward appearance.

The idea of separating faith and knowledge, as set forth in Boethius' treatise *De Trinitate*, will surface again with added force and in other historical circumstances, in the 12th and 13th centuries, when orthodox theologians interpreted it in one way, and radical-minded philosophers quite differently.

The distinguishing feature of Boethius' method was a striving for accuracy, for a definitiveness not subject to interpretation. This would also be the goal of medieval scholasticism, which sought schemata providing authentic and logically exhaustive explanations of any content. Boethius' treatises, though examining theological problems, do not really delve into their substance. The centre of gravity, as we see, shifted wholly to the domain of logic.

Explaining the unity and equivalence of all persons of the Trinity, for example, Boethius gave his explanation the form of a logical problem relating to sameness and plurality. "The essence of plurality," he wrote, "is otherness; apart from otherness plurality is unintelligible. In fact, the difference between three or more things lies in genus or species or number. Difference is the necessary correlative of sameness." Sameness is predicated in three ways: by genus, species, and number. Similarly difference is expressed by genus, species, and number." <sup>16</sup>

Could one say that this was part of a theological controversy? Hardly. What Boethius said above referred to any plurality, not only the Christian Trinity. He showed that any difference is the basis for the principle of plurality. The philosopher's interpretation was strictly verified and impeccably constructed from the point of view of logic. It turned a theological problem into a scholastic one,

whose postulates appear obligatory for any discourse that flows from the nature of human thought. Its outcome was simple and unambiguous, because it was thoroughly elaborated upon. But it was not the outcome of just that one discourse, not only of Boethius' own effort in that direction. It was also the final touch in the clear-cut thought schema that antique philosophers had been aspiring to ever since Parmenides and Plato, who were eager to know the origins and laws of human thinking in order to make it wholly precise and definite, and adequate in relation to the logico-semantic apparatus.

Boethius leaned on the powerful body of antique philosophy, and, at the same time, started a new chapter in the history of European thought under the head of scholasticist philosophy. There was, indeed, clear evidence of the definitive and rigid world of medieval scholasticism in Boethius' treatises. There was the same clarity and definiteness of language, and the same unambiguous thought constructions predominating over the changeable and transient ontological elements.

Here, all things were vested in a rigid form of concepts, and any tie in real existence was reflected in the relationship that sought unambiguity. It was a measured, immutable world, and as a result it was not at all comfortable. But human thought had had to stay there for a while in order to work out a tight discipline and acquire a taste for precision, without which science could not have advanced a single step.

The ten Aristotelian categories are the key to Boethius' theological exposition. "There are in all ten categories which can be universally predicated of things," he wrote, "namely, Substance, Quality, Quantity, Relation, Place, Time, Condition, Situation, Activity, Passivity."<sup>17</sup> He divided them into "essential" and "accidental". To prove the Trinity, he invoked the category of relation, which had nothing to do with the essence of the subject: "It simply denotes a condition of relativity, and that not necessarily to something else, but sometimes to the subject itself."<sup>18</sup>

In his treatise *Against Eutyches and Nestorius*, he elabora-

ted upon the category of substance and produced classic definitions of such notions as Nature (through its relation to thought), Person (personality), and pointed to the connection of the latter to the ancient Greek mask, assuming the latter to be the "indivisible substance of reasonable Nature". In the treatise which he entitled, *Quomodo Substantiae Bonae Sunt*, Boethius examined the categories of substance, existence, and being.

Boethius accepted the primordial purpose of the truth as a logical condition, a specific limit to thought. This would one day become typical, too, of scholasticism, which relied on Boethius' method rather than Augustine's.

Boethius' theological treatises were in high esteem among medieval thinkers. They turned to them, and especially to *De Trinitate*, at the most crucial time in the history of medieval philosophy. In the 9th century, Johannes Scotus Erigena, a self-sustained and audacious thinker, a man who gravitated towards pantheism and who was the first among a magnificent succession of medieval philosophers, tried in his commentaries to dismiss the distinctions between reason and faith, and did not ascribe primacy to the latter. His doctrine may well be traced to Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and also through Nicholas of Cusa to the German idealist philosophers of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The commentaries on *De Trinitate* by Gilbert de la Porrée, the eminent logician, precipitated a major ideological conflict in the 12th century, a time that abounded in conflicts. Gilbert de la Porrée, whom contemporaries described as the brightest mind of his age, was accused of heresy by Bernard of Clairvaux, a man reputed for his exalted state of mind, uncompromising service to the church, zealous appeals for crusades, and bitter hostility towards Peter Abelard. He showed especial zeal in interpreting Boethius' treatise. The clash that involved John of Salisbury, Peter the Lombard, the Italian-born scholastic theologian, and members of the Chartres school, then

the centre of free thinkers, reached its peak at the Ecumenical Council of 1147, where Gilbert de la Porrée was accused of having incorrectly interpreted the distinction between God and Divinity — which, indeed, finally cost him his life. The commentaries on Boethius' treatise produced by Clarenbald in the early 1150s were an echo of that clash.

And, finally, Thomas Aquinas chose the treatise *De Trinitate* as a model for his synthesis of Aristotle's doctrine and Christianity in the 13th century. His system was important not only for medieval philosophy, but also for the political and social scene of Western Europe. Initially rejected by the Catholic church, the teaching of Thomas Aquinas subsequently became its official doctrine, which it remains to this day. The Averroists, too, did not overlook Boethius' ideas, to which they ascribed a strongly anti-church tenor.

But it would be wrong to portray Boethius as a stiff rationalist. He took delight in the beauty of the world as unreservedly as he took pleasure in elegant logical constructions. He found harmony everywhere — in numbers, in the compound of the four elements, in the alternation of the seasons, the human soul, and sounds. It was through harmony, he wrote, that the celestial spheres blended into a beautiful single whole. Passages in his *Arithmetic* and *Music* seemed to anticipate the splendid anthems of praise that he dedicated to the beauty of the universe in the last of his works, *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

God had given the world harmony in order that "beautiful parts should blend into a beautiful creation", Boethius wrote, and the world's harmony he likened to the sweet sounds of the gentle *kithara*. Measure was the main principle governing harmonious unity. Boethius' definition of measure was clearly musical: it was something that did not permit the descent to reach complete silence, and that maintained a measure of height in the high strings that did not allow the taut string to burst from the thinness of the sound, for in "world music, as we know, there can be nothing so excessive as to destroy something else by its excessiveness."<sup>19</sup>



Measure must be abided by in quantitative as well as qualitative relationships, Boethius wrote. That was how God imparted measures to the elements, blending frost and heat, humidity and dryness, which conceded ground to each other in mutual trust. Thus, too, God made an individual's measure of happiness and unhappiness commensurable to the virtues of his soul.

The harmonious unity of all substance, Boethius held, was governed by proportional relationships. This idea (concerning proportions) Boethius set forth in its Pythagorean and Platonist interpretation. He wanted to create a universal picture of musical and mathematical proportionality, and therefore in his *Arithmetic* named another seven in addition to the main three types of proportion — the arithmetical, geometric and harmonious.

It was proportional blending, Boethius pointed out, that made musical chords pleasant to the ear, and that imparted plastic beauty to visible forms. For him beauty was above all commensurability, a proportional merging of parts.

Boethius' cosmic picture was also based on the principles of musical proportionality. The relations between the celestial spheres were equivalent to the relations that expressed musical intervals, he averred. The seven celestial spheres comprised a musical heptachord in which each planet represented one of the strings of the *kithara*. In other words, he conceived the Cosmos as a giant, specially adjusted (tuned) musical instrument.

In Boethius' view, proportions were analogous, among other things, to the political arrangements in a state. He compared arithmetical proportion to a state governed by a few. Harmonious proportion represented a republic governed by an aristocratic oligarchy, and geometrical proportion was a symbol of democratic government. Elaborating on the antique theory of proportions, he attributed special importance to their interpretation. This, he held, was one of the main aspects of mathematics and the theory of music.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Boethius was revered as a supreme authority on theoretical music. His textbook,

*De Institutione Musica*, was in use at Oxford until the 18th century, while in medieval times it was a disgrace for a student not to know his main propositions on music.

Boethius referred music to the theoretical disciplines, because it was, in fact, based on a knowledge of numerical modulations. He observed, however, that "any perception of the senses is so immediate and so naturally inherent in all living creatures, that without it one cannot even imagine what an animal is". (In a certain sense, the ancients numbered humans under the head of animals.) But it was impossible to obtain any accurate and stable notion about anything if one proceeded exclusively on the evidence of one's senses, he pointed out. And this because the nature of the senses was not always known and not known to all. Any person who saw a triangle or a square could no more judge of its essence correctly than a person who heard sounds could judge of their nature. In both cases, the person referred to someone cognizant of mathematics or, respectively, of music. Only reason could judge of differences and sounds.

Elaborating on the idea that music was intimately and naturally related to us, Boethius said we would not be able to give it up even if we wished. But he added: "We must invoke the power of thought so that science should also be able to master what Nature has given us. For as in the case of visual perception, it is not enough to see colour and shape because we must also look into their natural properties, so in hearing music it is not enough for us to enjoy the musical movements (cantilenas), and we should also know in what proportion sounds connected them." <sup>20</sup>

The science of music dealt with the musical harmony that was naturally inherent in the world and in man, and that connected the Cosmos, Man, and the phenomena of Nature whose intrinsic relations were determined by harmonious proportionality. Music connected them and constituted the essence of their kinship. Everything in the world was harmonious in Boethius' eyes, and therefore musical. The world was organically united and reasonable. Boethius' philosophico-aesthetic concept was shot

through with this Pythagorean and Platonist notion of world harmony.

Only a musician whose reasoning was based on the workings of his mind rather than the evidence of his senses, could know the harmony that reigned in the world. Still, Boethius said, if a person had no ear for music, he would not have the ability of distinguishing high tones from low, for they were apprehended both by the senses and reason. The senses were subordinate to reason, for reason's faculty of assessment was higher than that of the senses.

Reason was like a stave for the senses to lean upon. Hence, "we must not base all judgements on sensations, though any principle of the musical art originates from the auscultatory sense.... Hearing, in a way, plays the role of an indication whereas the subsequent perfection and ability to discern come from reason, which, following certain rules, governs everything like a lord".<sup>21</sup>

The senses were the pretext, as it were, for the existence of the arts. But they lacked firm judgement. The truth could not be understood through them if reason were missing. In saying so, Boethius referred to Pythagoras, who had, as he put it, rejected the judgement of his ears and turned to the rules.<sup>22</sup> He drew the conclusion that the ability to apprehend harmony has an ability to distinguish high and low sounds through the senses and reason. For sensation and reason, he said, were like an instrument of harmonious power: the senses apprehended but vaguely and approximately what the object in question happened to be, while reason judged of the whole and, going deeper, assessed the distinctions.

Boethius assumed that "all art, all science were by nature of a more honorable order than any craft",<sup>23</sup> for that was indicated by the assessment of the relation between reason and the senses. The former, he added, were associated with reason, while the latter was associated with sensations and skill. Indeed, the idea that it was "much more important to know what everybody does than to do what you know"<sup>24</sup> was the essential point in Boethius' musical instructions. He drew a firm line between reason

and action, theory and practice. The science of music as perceived by reason was for him much more important than performed music. The activity of the spirit was above the corporeal crafts, inasmuch as reason was above the body, and the body, bereft of its mentor, was in a state of enslavement. With his usual striving for the utmost precision of definitions, Boethius drew so conclusive a line between mental and physical activity, that he practically overlooked performed music. He took to the extreme the principle of antique musical aesthetics, which singled out from the sphere of the arts those parts which referred to computation and measurement. But, at the same time, he acknowledged the existence of a type of music that reposed not on measure but on sensibility acquired by continuous practice. Medieval musical aesthetics accepted this idea as Boethius had formulated it.

And really classic in medieval times was Boethius' definition of a musician: "He is a musician who has assimilated the science of singing by a carefully weighing reason. Not by slavish deed but by the bidding of mental judgement."<sup>25</sup> Abstract theorising was here contrasted to performing skill. Further on, however, the philosopher did mention performing musicians, though leaving them negligible space. In his *Music*, he described three types of people related to music: those who played an instrument, those who composed verse and song, and those who judge the performance. Those who play instruments, such as the *kitharist*, organist, and the like, those who proved their art by performing music, had no real knowledge of it, because their labours were dissociated from mental activity, which was the essence of music. Poets, who belonged to the second type, stood slightly higher than the former because they displayed an instinctive leaning to composing songs and were not entirely bereft of the ability to reason. Yet it was only the third group of people, who had experience in meditation and were capable of judging rhythms, cantilenas, tunes and songs, on a basis of mental judgement — only those were really musicians. In sum, music that was played was reduced to a craft that did not merit respect. Neither performing nor composing served art, particular-

ly music, but the activity of reason did.

The musician, as conceived by Boethius, dealt in his mental judgement with three types of music: "First is the world music, the second is human, and the third is designed for various instruments—the *kithara*, flute, and others—that imitate the cantilena."<sup>26</sup>

Boethius' description of the cosmos as a kind of specially organised musical instrument of colossal size, was the same as Pythagoras' in Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *De Caelo*. Music, so Boethius held, and above all world music, should especially be found in what we saw in the skies or in a combination of elements or in the variety of the seasons. How could so rapid an enormity of sky move in soundless flight, he asked. Even though the sounds of the motion of celestial bodies could not be caught by the human ear, he added, this was not because they were absent, but because we grew accustomed to them from birth. Harmony existed between all celestial bodies. "Nothing else could be as orderly and utterly adapted to one another," Boethius wrote.<sup>27</sup>

The second, human, type of music, was assimilated by anyone who concentrated. "Nothing but accord and a certain temperance, like the temperance that creates consonance of high and low voices, can blend the incorporeal liveliness of reason with the body. Nothing else can join parts of the soul, which, as Aristotle assumed, consists of a rational and irrational part."

Nothing but human music, he added, could connect elements of the body or duly relate one part of it with another.<sup>28</sup> Human music was harmony of soul and body. The soul, in turn, was the harmony of the body.

By seeing the soul in this light, Boethius came closer not to Aristotle, to whom he referred, but to Aristotle's disciple Aristoxenus, who was also strongly influenced by Pythagoreanism.

The third, instrumental, type of music was conceived by the stretching of, say, gut strings, or by blowing, as in the case of flutes, or by means of instruments that were set in motion by water or some sort of blow as, say, a blow upon some copper instrument—all this yielding various

sounds.<sup>29</sup> This instrumental music, the music of sounds, was essentially the subject of Boethius' *De Institutione Musica*, his textbook on music. This music was associated not only with mental insight, but also with the moral fabric of the soul. Speaking of the moral and ethical effect that music had on man, Boethius followed the tradition of the antique musical aesthetics which considered music a means of education and upbringing, a form of social practice. It was along these lines that he set out to elaborate on the problem of the musical ethos. Boethius assumed that nothing was more typical of human nature than to relax when hearing sweet tunes and to toughen from their opposite. This applied to all ages and to all occupations. Boethius referred to Plato when examining the connection between musical tunes and distinctions in the ways of individuals. He held that the dissolute spirit either enjoyed dissolute tunes or, when hearing them often, relaxed and was overcome by them. On the contrary, a severe mind was either pleased or tempered by more energetic tunes. Depending on its character, each tribe was more inclined towards a specific tune whose ethos was closest to it. So it was by the name of the tribe that we call its favourite tune — Lydian, Phrygian, or, say, Dorian. "Each tribe is enlivened by the tune that accords with its character," Boethius wrote, "and it is impossible that the soft should blend with the hard, or the hard with the soft, and that it should be pleased, for, as they say, love and enjoyment acquire measure through likeness. That is why Plato assumes that one should fear change in balanced music most of all. He says that in a State no danger to morality is greater than a gradual rejection of timid and modest music."<sup>30</sup>

Plato thought the most suitable tune for young people was the Dorian (severe, manly, and strict), and also allowed for the use of the Phrygian. Aristotle, however, criticised Plato for this, because, to his mind, the Phrygian tune was of an orgiastic nature. Boethius did not call attention to the description of each tune separately, but noted that tribes which were more severe enjoyed the more

brutal tunes of the Goths, while people of a milder nature enjoyed more moderate tunes.

Music had this great effect on people because there was no better road to learning than via the ear. Rhythms and tunes influenced thought, making it congruous with themselves. Obviously, for Boethius music was less a way of self-expression and much more a means of influencing a person's moral condition. He emphasised only one side of music, as did the antique aesthetics, which also ascribed to it an applied meaning only. In antique times, instrumental and vocal music served as an exercise rather than an outlet for the soul, just as gymnastics served for exercising the body. Music was the best means of educating and moulding the social individual. Hence the gravitation of the ancients towards restrained and manly tunes.

Boethius grieved because in his day the human race had become depraved, had lost its manliness and preferred playful, insipid tunes. He insisted that music should be more unassuming and modest, not wild and motley.

Boethius, like the Pythagoreans, held that music could be used for treating the sick. He retold the story of Arion, the legendary Greek poet, minstrel and lyre player, who delivered his countrymen of Lesbos from illnesses by his sweet songs, and the story of Ismenius of Thebes, whose playing had eased the pains of people of Boeotia suffering from gout, and then the stories of Empedocles and Hippocrates.

Boethius held that music derived its moral, magic, and medical effects from the proportions that united harmonious modulations and influenced the state of the human soul and the human body. Music turned out to be consonant with what there was in ourselves, he said. It generated a responsive movement in the souls of people, because, in substance, it was itself a specifically organised movement. Music had a part in man, and was organically connected with him. It could not be separated from man. Hence, it was not enough to merely take pleasure from music. It was essential to know its mathematical and proportional foundation, since its proportions were the same as the structural proportionality of the human soul. For music to

be aesthetically appreciated, there had to be in it a certain analogue of the knowledge and sensibility that distinguished the listener. It was reason alone that provided an adequate knowledge of the subject, since the senses apprehended nothing but the form objectified in matter. Reason, on the other hand, overlooked the outer appearance of an object, an attribute of the singular, and had the propensity for identifying the general. As we see, Boethius took aesthetic appreciation back again to its rationalistic foundation.

But how did Boethius define beauty? To begin with, he noted, beauty was a commensurability of the parts and was closely related to such concepts as harmony, measure, congruity, and unity. Nothing could be beautiful if it was not in a state of "friendly concord". Consequently, beauty possessed an intrinsic unity. The beautiful was that which pleased the eye and ear. Radiance and glitter were also an essential attribute. A thing or phenomenon had beauty both thanks to their own nature, that is, objectively, and depending on the subjective appreciation of the pleasure they imparted to the eye or the ear of the beholder.

In his *Consolation*, Boethius praised the beauty and congruence of the world, "which manifested what inspired life in the universe".<sup>31</sup> But while he expressed his delight, he was also regretful that earthly and human beauty was frail, perishable, and unstable. This, Boethius held, was due to the fact that the degree of beauty was not the same in all creation. The superior and true beauty was in the First Cause of subsistence, the Omniscient, the highest good. It was infinite, immutable, and perfect. God, the "most beautiful", carried in his reason a beautiful world, giving it the form that corresponded to the conceived image.<sup>32</sup> The lower something was in the hierarchy of subsistence, therefore, the less perfect was its beauty. Here we have a purely Neoplatonist interpretation of beauty. At the base of the pyramid is the beauty of inanimate things. The human eye delights in the sparkle of precious stones, the sight of rich vestments. "But what is enclosed in this astonishing sparkle, this magnificence of



gems, does not belong to people," Boethius observed, and asked: "How is it that something bereft of the movements of soul and body should appear truly beautiful to an animate creature endowed with reason?"

What should attract notice in precious stones, Boethius went on to say, was not their superficial beauty, but "their maker's workmanship and their diversity".<sup>33</sup> Valuable and rich vestments, Boethius held, lacked true beauty. They were beneath man by nature and consequently, the aesthetic appreciation they evoked, was deceptive.

Man delighted in the beauty of Nature. It was the "most beautiful part of a beautiful creation".<sup>34</sup> People admired the sight of green fields, a tranquil sea, and spring flowers. That beauty was above the beauty of precious stones or vestments, because it was animate. But it was separate from man. The beauty of the surrounding world was but a source of pleasure to the eye. And by the nature of subsistence, it did not belong to man, was transient and fragile.

Beauty, like the true good, should be sought not in outer things, but inside man's soul. "Is it in the order of things that a creature, deservedly accounted divine for the gift of reason should seem to have no other excellency than the possession of a little inanimate household stuff?" Boethius asked, and added: "All other creatures are content with that, they have of their own; and you, who in your mind carry the likeness of God, are content to take the ornaments of your excellent nature from the most base and vile things, neither understand you what injury you do your Creator."<sup>35</sup> The beauty of things that are by nature separate from man, though they may please the eye, cannot serve him as an adornment or a source of genuine pleasure. "For if any adjoined thing seems precious," Boethius concluded, "it is that which is praised that hides that which is covered and enwrapped in it, and remains notwithstanding of the same baseness which it has for itself."<sup>36</sup>

The beauty of the human body was in Boethius' eyes a thing of a higher order than the beauty of things separat-

ed from it. But it, too, bore the imprint of grief and frailty that was in all temporal things. Hence, one ought not to wish beauty of face or body, for what delights you and what delights others, may be destroyed by illness.

From the ethical viewpoint, bodily beauty ranked as an outward good which did not show the road to bliss, and did not by itself afford bliss. This beauty was the effect of the imperfections of human eyesight, for if people "could see through stone walls, would they not judge that body ... outwardly most fair, to be most foul and ugly by discovering his entrails".<sup>37</sup>

To discover true and infinite beauty, Boethius said, turn your eyes from earthly goods, seek knowledge of yourself, and contemplate the "marvellous sight of heaven", across which is spread the divine radiance embodying the perfect image of the highest beauty.

Boethius' aesthetics was rationalist by nature. Reason was for him the main criterion of aesthetic appreciation. He came forward as a theorist of harmonious and proportional beauty. By so doing, he followed the antique views on beauty. His conception of perfection and the congruence of the universe left an ineradicable imprint on the medieval aesthetics. Until and including the 15th century there was hardly a theorist of music who failed to fall back on Boethius' conception of "world harmony". It was also reflected in literature and philosophy, albeit through the prism of the Christian vision.

Boethius devoted some 25 years to the search for the truth. From the mathematical sciences he skipped to logic, and from logic to theology, and addressed himself to Plato and Aristotle. He was a man of vigour. Politics and government were for him just another form of search, because the truth was conceived not only in philosophical solitude and seclusion, but also in the crucible of day-to-day life.

Boethius showed that acquiring the supreme value enclosed in the truth did not call for any special conditions. Every man could strive for it, for every man was endowed with reason, that sole guide that could lead to the goal. True, reason must be complemented with lofty moral

principles. But for Boethius this was so natural that he denied the rights of reason to any mind that was moved by evil intentions. A truly human reason, he said, was one that was pure and that aspired to the highest goal.

Throughout those 25-odd years, Boethius had never gone against his own theoretical principles. But all that time he was blessed with good fortune and had known no grief. Would he be true to them in adversity? It would appear that life had decided to test him...

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Claudianj  
opera.

172.



Dux spiritus regeret montes. hauriret hinc  
 flumina. sanguines tangeret astra nubes.  
 iam liber parnassus erat. neque solus  
 lepetat erecta surgere fronde nemus.  
 lonasque diu spaciatis frondibus omni  
 securus uentis explorare comas.  
 te qui impeto spumant sepe uenerat  
 lephasus. liquidis purior ibat aquis.  
 Omnis ideo pean regio sonat. omnia phaeacum  
 Ruma canunt. tripodas plenior auri.  
 Argioque procul mularum carmine diu  
 ad chemidis coheunt antea seueras.  
 Hunc alto domum telis phaeone perempti  
 conuenit ad nostram sacra caetera summa  
 in stabilem seruare augustas fratribus orbem.  
 ubi nam. miribus arma regunt.



Sape in dubia rari sententia mentes.  
 emaret super cunctas. an nullus melle  
 Rector. modo fuerent mortalia casu.  
 Haec cum disposui quissim federa mundi  
 rescriptisq. maris fines. anniq. meatus  
 et lucis noctisque uoces. tunc omnia reba  
 consilio firmata dei. qui lege mouens  
 idem. qui fruges diuerso tempore nasci  
 in uariam phaebeo alieno iusserit igni  
 compelli. solemq. suo. parceret undis  
 Iura. tellurem medio libauerit gr  
 et cum res hominum tanta caligine uol  
 spuerem. letosq. diu florere nocente  
 gratiq. pio. rursus labefacta cadebat  
 Religio. cauteq. uiam non sponte sequeretur.

Ex Museo Petri Dubrowsky.









q' il a tunc belle et loial  
y n'eo angles espiuals  
n' iroie estre plus ebier seun q'ebier  
n' est acut aresos comper q' p'ro m'io  
d' ecc' p'omies d'ut asq'  
q' es nest leu aini recomerons  
d' ecc' p'omies auno.

**L**a damoiselle que mouir  
d' aint recellu toie p'air  
d' tuc cane aune et tant or ebier  
n' si fine ore re p'ogier  
q' il ne loit q'at en la uie  
n' eferont la auna fame.  
d' amoi toy loz u g'atara.  
d' e la mes autres ne laun  
n' e m'io m'aura toie reu.  
b' ielle fer illi t'ec uos pal.

d' aune moi amastes i'p'ouise  
n' i'ouit q' n'it amoi referoise  
d' e moie p'ant uos d'it bien.  
q' u ne s'c'v'ist n' tenen.  
d' on aier aune toy loz uca.  
j' a p'ur aune noui e'ch'ing'at.  
d' ecc' sefont e'ch'it p'ieu.  
a' i'ni qui soient re p'ant.

1. i'conuoiis or la tane d'it  
q' u furent bois de la are.  
e' clo la l'urent aqoi d'urent.  
e' r' q' uoluniers la recoitens.  
d' onre u i'unt d'io m'ecco  
nois d'ell' amon rois uiluxes.  
d' dis aials er m'ent'ecus.  
q' i'ouit'ecus fu sire ce d'it  
e' e'bis bien n'is foisane.

**L**a pluis p'oures est n'ec cane.  
d' amoiselle p'loie foie.  
d' i'ens n'et p'uer d'ont confort.  
d' e' p'oules or grane toloz.  
q' e' si seio i'ongt d'el' amon.

e' m'io or toie n'eno.  
e' u' s'c'v'ant mouir q' p'antia  
e' e' u' s'c'v'ant mouir q' p'antia  
q' i'ans en soffit g'it p'ame.  
q' e' s'c'v'ant mouir q' p'antia  
b' ielle fer u' i'ouit se p'ant.  
q' i'ouit amoi est se'ha.  
1. i'ouit re uos e' u' s'c'v'ant.  
y' o'ioioie auoir p'ant conuenant.  
q' i'ouit f'usse amon m'uant.  
d' e' p'ur ce non q' e' p'ur est tof.  
e' r' q' e' p'ur somes p'ies d'el'ost.  
j' e' uos e' n'as m'ule m'eri.  
q' e' a'eb' u'aler ce a' m'ul.  
o' i'ouit e' u' s'c'v'ant tof de m'ame.  
a' i'ni en u'ouit a' soffit g'it p'ame.  
d' u' uos p'icst q' e' c' a' u' e' g'ie.  
o' e' m'ule m'ecco m'it m'ec'ing'ie.  
q' e' u'it e' u'it soie l'ant.  
e' u'is rois e' c' s'c'v'ant n'os.  
a' la g'ent q' uos o'ne n'oue.  
d' a' q' e' f'ert rois i'ouit a' m'ie.  
d' ecc' n' uos toie b'om b'laumer.  
q' e' u'it a' i'ouit o' p'ulier.  
q' e' g'ens q' e' a' u' e' n' s'c'v'ant u' e' u'it.  
n' e' a' c'ouit n' e' c'ouit.  
q' a' i'ouit s'c'v'ant s'c'v'ant a' u' e' a' u' e' s.  
b' i'le e' c' d'it d'io m'os.  
o' u' g'os d' amoi n' e' m' e' n' e' m'io.  
12 e' a' u' e' n' e' f' u' a' m'io.  
d' e' r' e' n' e' q' e' a' m'io u' uos m' e' a' r' e.  
q' i'ouit g'it b'laume r' e' m'it.  
n' e' s' e' m' e' u' o' u' l' e' s' i' l' e' p'ant.  
d' a' u' e' s' c'v'ant b'ien c' e' r' e' n' e' m'ant.  
q' e' u' uos m' e' a' m' o' n b' i' e' n' e' s' p' o' u' r.  
n' e' o' i' e' n' e' q' e' r' g'it roie auoir.  
t' r' e' o' q' e' i' e' a' i' e' s' e' u' a' n' e' r' e.  
d' auoir u'it amoi s'ant d' e' a' n' e' t' e' r' e.  
e' r' e' q' e' a' i' e' u' e' s' t' e' r' e' f' o' l' a' z.





A ar mi conuient ama nallor.  
 Q e enost pieigne fol amoi.  
 Q ar ie uoi et coniois qe garviter.  
 eo oi conuient plus qe de puerier.  
 E puelle qan en de la uoi.  
 S aroier se voir de blasme auoir.  
 Q ar culas qe font sagement.  
 E nlor ebambies puerement.  
 N esen poent eant bien garviter.  
 Q eelles ne facent paillier.  
 N iuioisiois nel eboie fere.  
 Q elen prust amai reuer.  
 N on ferat ne ni nai coraige.  
 eo co tant esto de laur pirage.  
 E pueri se lonc le men auis.  
 b ten a faim et bien apna.  
 N i uoi uoi eboie fere acoire.  
 Q uie soit rote loial et uoie.  
 eo co soit uel noir puelle.  
 T ane piousse nebe ni bele.  
 S eul qe de nens nouist amoi.  
 Q e pas uos eulst refusier.  
 N eie noui refuso auren man.  
 eo co nai coraige ne eulst ane.  
 Q e uoi ni autre amai poi men.  
 S i poe bien estre certain.  
 S eie me uoie aproumer.  
 N iu plus uoie autre ebei.  
 eo co nen ai pan sec ne uoie.  
 N eia de moi uoie auoir.  
 D iomeis ni fu pas foie.  
 N i pas ne voir il foi ni loz.  
 b en enrent qe ne nrop sanuag.  
 Q e n uoi me ai mon bien espoir.  
 a meti uoi d amoi uerage.  
 T ane a en uoi uie menage.  
 Q e uoi a uie de moi merai.  
 E qe moi uerage poi amai.  
 p uoi qe moi uie eie loioi.  
 T ane uoi uie de moi coraige.  
 belle ce facioi uos puoir.

N u conuient ne on de sion.  
 Q ar ason gre ce son pleisir.  
 1 uioisiois deo ore med senuir.  
 S e uoi moi uoie giedon.  
 S en el enqier nul auit don.  
 D eia meime seai meo.  
 E seie uie de boie deo.  
 N i uoi nul plus nebe de moi.  
 E niois de grece ne en mai.  
 oie deit plus uioisiois.  
 eo co tant furent deo deites ptes.  
 N i poie plus oli paillier.  
 eo qe uenit au de senuir.  
 1 uoi eie meime fons meris.  
 Q e uoi face ses amis.  
 a uerant qui ce de sion.  
 V i uoi ses gais li uoie.  
 eo co en se uoi le sion tait bien.  
 Q e uoi ne sen pertant uen.  
 eo oie sen sion li ne conuist me.  
 eie en sion tait mane.  
 T ane eie uoi uie uen.  
 eo co aie uie mu sion.  
 eo oie la uoi eie li.  
 S e uoi sen eie uoi ambou.  
 E aie en pte de pte.  
 S e uoi lor uie ramponie.  
 p ar qe uoi uie uoi amai.  
 Q e uoi uie uie uoi.  
 b la uie en eie eie uoi eie.  
 S n uie qe uie pte aie uie.  
 V uoi uie uie uie uie.  
 T uoi uie uie uie uie.  
 E aie uie uie uie uie.  
 oie uie uie uie uie.  
 eo oie uie uie uie uie.  
 eo oie uie uie uie uie.  
 D iomeis tant la uoi uie.



Benoît de Sainte-More, *Roman de Troie*. A 14th-century script from Northern Italy







TANTUMMODOSCRIB  
 TORARUMMIRABI  
 LIALTUDINECTIM  
 PABILITUMILITATE  
 DISCUNTURHACI  
 TURINSTRUCTIONE  
 PRAEDITUMQUAM  
 SIGNAINCOENITA  
 LECTORCONNONIM  
 PEDIERINTOMTEM  
 ETHAMILEMCO  
 DESUBIUGATIONE  
 NITERRPOCTONE  
 RATUMISAREINX  
 CEFUNDATUMC  
 RADICATUMC  
 TECTUMDINCARITA  
 TEQUENSCIENTIA  
 INFLARENONPOSSI  
 ACCEDATADAMBI  
 CUSIGNAINSCRIBI  
 RISCONSIDERANDA  
 ETDISCUTIENDADE  
 QUOSIANTERNO  
 TUMNOINEDICERE  
 ACCURATUMQUODDO  
 MINUSCOPARE  
 DICNABHORE

EXPLICIT

LIBER

Abundus

DEDOCTRINA

INCHRISTO

TIANA

Lege et ora pce

o ca

m. p

ce

Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus), *Collection*. An Italian 5th-century script

Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*. A 6th-century script from Cassiodorus' Vivarium



**O**MN. VNICEPTAS IN VN.   
 est quiratione quo   
 quomodo accipossunt   
 beato sent omnes ho   
 mines velle: quia velle   
 sint uelondepiant.   
 Immortaliam quae   
 ric infirmos mult   
 magis quae econtra   
 uersa e concitacis   
 in quib. philosophi sua   
 studia et otia conati   
 uerant: quasi me   
 diam addacere ad q.   
 di eucere et longum   
 est. et non necessarii   
 amissum recolere   
 qui haec de se quid   
 in libro egerint mus   
 octagone elezendis   
 philosophis cum qui   
 bus haec de beata ui   
 ta quae post mortem   
 futura est quae scio   
 tractare cur. ultra   
 ad eam unido uero   
 quae etiam me pfector   
 est deorum. ampl   
 nimis dis religione

sacrisq. seruando   
 uenire possimus;   
 etiam hic eadem   
 pena expectat pr   
 seruam cum possit   
 relegendis si for   
 obliuisciscadua   
 memoriam. elez   
 enim platonicos   
 num philosophos   
 merito nobiliss   
 propterea quia   
 re potuerunt h   
 in mortalem ac   
 tionalem uel in   
 lectualem homin   
 animam nisi par   
 patione nomine illi   
 di a quo capta et   
 da facta est bea   
 esse non possit; ita   
 lud quod omnes ho   
 nes adpetant id   
 uitam beatam q   
 quam ista adscit   
 rom negant; qu   
 no nullum opor   
 quod est incomm   
 tabili sed purice

Ex Museo Petri Dubrowsky





# IN EP. LAFIA PRIMILIBRI OROSI PRESBITERI;

I Scribens beato augustinus  
non promittit se uniuersiorbis situm clades que deseri  
tres partes esse totius mundi spatium dicit. (unum)  
hoc est asia. europa. & africa. III Descriptio pro  
uinciarum totius asiae & qualitas locorum;  
II Descriptio europae uel quaequales quae sint eius pro  
Descriptio africae. prouinciarum & insu. (unitae)  
larum eius; VI Dillubium factum refert;  
III Ninum regem armis primū inuasit se alienos ter  
minos & portum semiramis uxor ipsius amplius ad  
III Regione sodomorum igni conflagrasse. (didisse)  
caelesti. Dillubium acaie factum ogygi regis tem  
Deuber tate & sterilitate egypti tem (poribus)  
poribus ioseph; XI Dillubium factum ter alia  
sub rege deugalione; XII temporibus moymalaque  
inlata sunt egypto; XIII mala & turpia uel signen  
ta antiquorum in egypto gesta; XIV Bellum in  
ter cretenses & athenienses gestūque mala a the  
nensibus procurauit; XV qualiter amazonae  
or te gentes chyticorum uel quā strenue pugna  
II Euerisio troie. Defunctus (uarint)  
regni asitru cladis dositranis latro ubi cyrus impe  
rant pugna sua lidas exercuit; XVI pallaristycu  
lus tyrannidem adsum sit sub quo taurum aeneū  
factum misera uile cruciatum hominibus erat;  
XVIII bellum inna inter lachedaemonios & almerse  
nos plurima populorum strage fecerant;

EXPLICIT CAPITULA. LIB. I.

corberensis

monas 2211

Ex Museo Petri. Dubravsky



3

pene consumpti; Athenienses uero ab his parthiis  
allace demonum xxx rectores per conditione pacti  
suscipiunt quimo xxx tyranni deciderunt quos  
athenienses prudentissimis consiliis abiciunt et liber-  
tatem recipiunt; x Arria rex xerxes viro fratre  
occiso solus regnum asiae optinuit; x Terremo-  
tus cyliciae et athalantis ciuitatis submersio uel  
pestes atheniensium; xviii ubi galli romanum  
exercitum extinguentes ipsam urbem ingres-  
si pene uniuersa incendio et cladio demoliti sunt;

EXPLE. CAP. IV. LIBRI SECVNDI.  
OROSI PRESBITERI. . . .  
IN EP. I. PAULI OROSII

Preceptis tuis paruobis sine patre augustine ac que  
utnam tam efficaciter quam libenter quam quā  
ego inuitam uis par tempus a se pliciter mouer  
rectone ansecus gerim, tu enim iam is to iudiciola  
horati uirum ne hoc quod precipere possem, ego  
autem solus oboedientiae sitamen uoluntate  
conatuque decorauit. testimonio contentus sum,  
nam et in magna patris familia domo cum sint mul-  
ta diuersi generis animalia adiumento rei familia-  
ris commoda. non est tamen canum cura positi-  
ma. quibus solis natura insimul est uoluntate  
adio quod praeparantur urgeri. et per ingenia  
quandam oboedientiae formam sola disciplina  
et timoris expectatione suspendi. donec ad per gen-  
diligentiam nutus ignouemur tatur. habentem



**A**rguina q' quodam studio flexere pen-  
 s' lectus deu mectos cogit inile mox.  
 Et ex m' lacere vident seipenga camente.  
 Et uenit elegi flexus ora uagant.  
 Et in litem nullus potuit priore uenit.  
 Et nostrum colluctos plaqueant uenit.  
 Et laia felices olim tuosq' tuuente.  
 Volantur meta nunc mea facta senis.  
 Ene enim prospera malis inopia senata.  
 Et color etatem iuile inesse suam.  
 Et nictu festui sunt uentura uertere cani.  
 Et tremor efficit corpore licta cunis.  
 Et ois hominum solus q' se nec dulabit annis.  
 Et nictu et mectis sepe uocatu uenit.  
 Et in heu q' sumus misos iuilem aue.  
 Et flexus oculos clauere seia negat.  
 Et um leuio male fira bonis fastidia fuit.  
 Et ene caput tristis inuicem heu inuicem.  
 Et tunc quia fallacem mutatur nubila uenit.  
 Et rotante ingratas simpul una mox.  
 Et uio me felicem totiens lictis inuicem.  
 Et in cecrot stabili no erat ille gnuu.  
 Et quia inuicem erat sepe reputarem q' inuicem.  
 Et in officio designet inuicem in siq' inuicem uenit e mulier admo-  
 dum redempti uenit oenit uenit uenit a uenit oem huius ualentem  
 p'p'etate colore uenit atq' i' echaula inuicem. Oenit uti eui plena  
 fuerit ut nullo m' crederet nictu et uenit inuicem et uenit oem erat am-  
 bigne. Nam nictu q' ex eo oem se se huius inuicem cohabebat. Ne  
 uo pulsat celum firmi uenit cacumine uenit. Oenit cu alius ca-  
 put oculis sepe ipm enas celum penetrabat. Respuentatq' huius  
 inuicem inuicem. T'elios erat tenuissim filis subili nictu  
 inuicem inuicem. Quas uti post e' uenit uenit cognoui sul-  
 The liber de domus se' trinitatis ordieatq' i' uenit q' uenit inuicem

ut timoris fallacium affectionum tenebris pleniorum uere-  
 lucis possis agnoscere.  
**M**orbibus atris s' orna ceno  
 Conditu nullu q' uenit obstat.  
 F' uenit possunt Quia q' uagant  
 S' itera lumen. Monibus alus  
 S' in re uoluent De fluius amnis  
 Turbous haulter S' epe resistit  
 Misceat estum Kupe soluti  
 V' itera duum O bice laxi.  
 P' nq' seuenis Guuq'q' siuis  
 V' ita diebus Lumine clazo  
 Nox resolutio E emere uenit  
 Est hec paulisp' obtineat. Atq' ubi attentio  
 meaz modesta trauitmate collegit sic exo-  
 la est. Si penitus egratimms tue causis ha-  
 bituq' cognoui fortune p'oris affectu desce-  
 uaq' tabesat. Ea tm' animi tui statu sicuti  
 tu tibi fingis mutata puerit. Intelligo mli  
 fomes illi prodigij ficos. et consp' cu his q's  
 Tramite recto  
 Carpere callem  
 Gaudia pelle.  
 Pelle timorem.  
 S' p' meq' fugato  
 Nec doloz adfit.  
 Nubila mens e  
 V' inctiq' frenis  
 hec ubi regnant.  
 Explicat liber primus.  
 Incipit secundus.



Explicit liber secundus. Incipit Tertius.

**N**am tantum illa finierat euz me audiendi audis sup̄  
remq; arectis adhuc aurib; carminis mulcedo desierat.  
Itaq; paulo post o inq; sumū lassor solam animorū q̄rit  
me ul' sententiarū pondē ul' iocunditate eaz canēdi reformi  
sti. Atq; ut itz me post hoc imparē fortune ierib; ēē non  
arbitrer. Itaq; remedia q̄ paulo aciora ēē dicebas non  
in nō phoresco. si audiendi auid' uehēnter flagito. Sūz  
illa sensi inq;. Cum ūba nra tūctis atēntisq; inpiebas.  
Cumq; tue mentis habuam ul' expectam ul' q̄ ē uerū  
īpā p̄feci. Talia sunt quippe q̄ restant ut degustata q̄q;  
mordeant inuis aile recepta dulcescant. Et q̄ tu ē audiendi cu  
pidum dīas quāto auid' flagimes. Si quonāz te aduicē agredum  
agnosces. Quonam inq; aduicem inq; felicitatem quā tuus quoz  
sōpniat animi. Et occupato ad ymaginez usū. īpāz illāz nō potest  
intueri. Tum ego sic obsecro. 7 que uera illa sit sine cōtortione de  
mōstra. Faciāz inq; illa tui causa libentē. Et q̄ tibi cā nocet ē eam  
p̄us designare ūbis atq; informare conabor ut ea p̄specta cū in  
ānam p̄tem flexis ocellis uē speam bñarōis possis agnoscere. 7

**Q**ui serere ingenium uolet agrum  
Liberet aua prius fructibus.

Falce rubos silicemq; reseruet.  
Vt noua fruge grauis ceres eat.  
Dulcior est apum mage labor  
Si malus ora prius sapor erat.  
Gratus astra nitent ubi notus.  
Desinit imbuteros dare sōpnos.  
Lucifer ut tenebras pepulit.  
Pulciores roseos agit equos.  
Tu quoq; falsa tuens bona puus.  
Inape colla iugo retrahere.  
Vera dehinc animi subieunt.

**T**um desiro paululuz usū 7 uelut mangustaz sue menoz  
secez recepta sic cepit. Omnis mortaluz cura q̄ mīstaphiaz



INNOC CORPO  
RE CONTINEN  
TUR HISTORIE  
ECCLSIASTICE  
EX SOCRATE  
SOZOMENO  
ET THEODORITO  
IN UNUM COL  
LECTI ET NUPER  
DE GRECO IN  
LATINUM TRANS  
LATI LIBRI DUO  
DECIM NUMERO  
FECIT FERIN  
DNO AMEN

Incipit prefatio in libro  
ecclesiastice historie triper  
tite.

IN OMNIBUS LIBRIS POSTERIORIS PARTIS  
FUTURI SPERIS QUIBUSQUE INDI  
CIBUS. Quid enim commo  
utrumque prius potest ideo  
discretio nequid potest  
neque confandote. Et ideo  
aut huiusmodi ecclesiastice  
quod cum totis christiani  
necessitate confutetur.  
Nihilus grecis iudeis  
misit hanc consuetudinem  
et prius. Unde scribitur in  
prophetia quod opus dicitur  
discretio similis. Sed in  
opere quod non populum  
scribitur neque librum. Unde  
et aliquid necessarium duximus  
eorum dicere de fidei  
ut scribitur in  
quod opus. Et de apostolis  
unum fuisse dicitur.  
Certe quidam prius quod  
dicitur in  
duo in  
monasterio  
monasterio  
scribitur in  
scribitur in  
scribitur in

6. 500

lit. scy pet. anbera

Historia Ecclesiastica  
tripertita et collecta in unum  
ex serale sermone et  
Liberis in Latinam  
translata a Catholico Indole  
et Imperante

Doctores confert dicit: apum  
quo conuoluerunt;

10. **D**ominus si in manu eius eripuerit  
 iniquitatem meam.

¶ Quidam dicitur canonicus de clonie  
iussit ut si de quibus

Episcopus ueloxiensis pon  
tificis ueloxiensis iudicium

fies & celestius iedus fuis uos sum  
Eius dicitur & uos sum

**C**onsiderans pater episcopum  
qui per suam uocacionem

Episcopus custodi iudicium  
num episcopi qvq

Dependuntque in modum  
his oculis.

**S**omologuenus et quid  
modis sing. ut de clousie p. 100. g.

et querendū lūgo relinendū uest  
nūsuscepit p̄dūat sic lūte uerū

*vltij* Epistulae consueuerunt

principij iudicij iudicij p[ro]p[ri]a  
f[aci]e iudicij iudicij q[uod] iudicij

Quine que ppeffuene que

*quod si quis propter hoc dixerit  
in die iudicii dicat nichil fecerit  
consequenter non est deus et non*

comparatus colat p[er] concilio

UNIVERS. LIBR. PRU

Domus, oratio ad locum  
Sorum. In the 100 si

*(Faint, illegible text from the reverse side of the page)*

pituf diligenter  
fendit fuis legibus

teme qd ff quidem  
d' nuc mō adum

pas pape ieq: d'omic. Echus  
Echus d'omic d'omic d'omic

uq̃ huetriat mactandō  
fictis ames die sic in heram

estis quicquid scilicet scilicet  
per confessionem vestram legem  
que iudicium dicitur

quod teleguina dicitur quod maled  
sona; Poppo tollit sedem nati  
ne sic maled dicitur quod dicitur

de la g... de la... de la...  
 sona... de la... de la...  
 en la... de la... de la...

equi doctores uel doctores  
proferre laudum in sinu

scilicet: dñs noster ih̄s x̄p̄s  
illiusque fidei gratieque similes

dominacione. Aliis itaque: licet  
deprecatoris diffinilo compas

offorectieq ielaq amcausie m  
pupusie elcisiie plasm

p<sup>r</sup>omueare & uq<sup>i</sup>uaffes conlefp  
q<sup>i</sup>onit infinuabena Alus

*Conicungulicreus apertum*





A Scribe. Miniature from an Italian script of the works of Lactantius dating to the 14th or 15th century

Venantius Fortunatus, *Book of Poetry*. An early 9th-century script

Quasiqñs Immaculato meo sepe minue gñau  
 Ista cōsuetudine adare que compere fuit  
 Ergo Quod Innoscentie uidetionatus exprope forme  
 Ita mecum sepeaus ut scilicet ueroquidit  
 Quos uos hominisqñ austroaus deprecor ope  
 Quia cumulum legias cum pieatit meum  
 Quiem leaus quos uiatlet diuac mēsa  
 Gna atqñ uiatlet fina atqñ leau modo

Mole- sut hinc atqñaus eiuidetur iuse- necessest

spm. c. andon

Soma quon genua gñellere aqñre atqñ

Prodiu xpi gñendens pēcepit aduauis

Conaempia pīaquis mēat- teraui opā

Hinc sibi conaempia cōnatit cōpīa fūit

Hamēia uia hēre pēpīe uos gñisli

h. adit. i. d. amas

Hunc uos gñit pēpīe pīauiat mēgīa fūit

Emblemata

Et cumulo quē mēat cōdīa- tra cumulum —

adelm

**INCIPIUNT VERSUS QUIBUS DE LIA TERIS TERAM**

**MANU AQUIBUS INCIPIUNT**

Istaqñ cōhēre lugāat quīe gñine sepeas

Cumulum quē simul cōdīa- tra cumulum —

Dispaus mēdēuōis cōpīe legibus illu

Oqñdīe nommulatens cōpīe mēat- teraui opā

Exuclat quon dīe fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Cum pīdīe dīatendi mēat- teraui opā

Mūnē- fūit nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Uos fūit- dum lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Sūm- fūit nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Quos lūpīdus nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Exuclat nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Cōnatit nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

In pīdīe nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

Nūnē lūpīdus fūit- dum lūpīdus uos

A  
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## COGITANTI MIHI ET

Cum autem  
meo sepe reputanti priorem illi  
generis humani statum. & mirum  
pariter & indignum uideri solet.  
quod unus seculi stultitia religi-  
ones uarias suscipientes. deoique  
multos esse credentes in tantam

subito ignorationem sui uentum est. ut ablata ex oculis uerita-  
te neque religio dei ueri. neque humanitatis ratio teneatur ho-  
minibus non in celo summum bonum querentibus sed in terra. qua  
ob causam. profecto seculorum ueterum mutata relicta est.

Gregory the Great, *Four Books of Dialogues*. A 13th-century script



**S**icut miratur agnabul  
gru bntio a noie ad  
noie pueria (sue ge  
tos perty fenile. ficut  
qntqz mouit infensu nulli  
animi uoluptati debet. **S**  
ed i hac fin aduoc ede id qu  
ut hie an puenull defpiciu  
in audiu mudi in flore.  
liberz gme cepula nulle re  
pente gme uolubis luma. **S**  
ens machina ficut. **S**er at

[illegible]



tum ut eam uel argumentis uel exemplis uel ydoneis testibus as-  
 seramus & stultitiam quam deorum cultores obiectare non  
 desinunt ut nullam penes nos sic totam penes ipsos esse doceamus  
 & q̄q̄ prioribus libris cum falsis arguerim religiones &  
 hic cum falsam sapientiam tollerem ubi ueritas sit ostenderim  
 planius tamen que religio que sapientia uera sit liber proximi-  
 mas indicabit.



Scribilla

The Dame Philosophy, Instructress of Sages and Poets. Miniature from an Italian script of the works of Lactantius dating to the 14th or 15th century

Gregory the Great, *Four Books of Dialogues*. A 13th-century script

Sequitur eiusdem libri duodecimus.

**M**ULTA. SATAGIT. cor me  
um domine in hac copia uite mee  
pulsatum uerbis sancte scripture  
me. Et recte plerumq; in semeteco  
piosa est egestas humane intelligentie: quia  
plus loquitur inquisitio q̃ inuenio. et longior  
est petitio q̃ impetratio. Et operosior est man  
ipulsans q̃ sumens. Tenemus promissum. quis  
corrumper illud si deus pro nobis. quis contra  
nos est. petite et accipietis. querite et inuenie  
tis. pulsate et aperietur uobis. Promissa tua  
sunt. quis falli timeat. cum promittat uitas. iussi

eni dampni appetitis. nulla lucti mei. nulla ulciscendi libi  
dine. sed cu dicit. eam faciam. et paret nō esse impitren  
tes. Quis ex aperit istas tortuosissimā et implicatissimā  
neciositates. Sed a ē. nolo in ea intente. nolo ea intete.  
Te uolo iustitia. et innocentia pulcra et recta. honestis lu  
minib; et insatiabili facietate. Quies ē. apud te ualce.  
et uita imperturbabil. q̃ intrat uite. intrat i gaudiū dñi  
sui. et nō timebit. et habebit se optime i optimo. reflu  
ego abste et aui. deus me. nimis reuolus a stabilitate t  
in. et olescena mei. et scis suis in regio egestatis. 3-3

Confessionum beati Augi libri secundo explicat.

Sequitur eiusdem libri tertius.

**V**ENI. CARTHAGINEM. et circumst  
rebat me undiq; sarrago flagitiosā amoris.  
Hundus amabā. et amare amabā. et secretōi  
idigenta ocerā me nimis indigentes. Querebā quō  
amare amans amaret oceram securitate et nū sine a  
musculis. qm fames in erat inuis. ab uisore cibo te  
ipō de me. et ei fame nō esinebā. sed erat sine obsecro  
alimentoꝝ incorruptibilū. nō q; plen' eis em. sed quo  
inamoi eo fistidiosior. et recto nō bene ualebat aia mei.  
et ulcersa piacebat se foras insatiabilē. scalpī amida a  
contactū sensibilū. Sed si nō haberet aiam itaq; non  
amarent. amari et amare dulce erat in magis. si etia



**H**ec est liber primus confessionis beati Augustini.

**C**ONFESSIONVM. MEARVM

libri tredecim et de malis et de bonis  
meis tecum laudant iustum et bonum.  
atque in eum excitant humanum intel-  
lectum et affectum. Quid de illis alijs  
sentiant ipsi uterunt. Multis tamen fratribus eos  
multis placuisse et placere scio. A primo usque ad decimum  
de me scripti sunt. in tribus ceteris de scripturis sanctis.  
ab eo quod scriptum est. In principio fecit deus celum  
et terram usque ad saluati requies. In quarto libro cum  
de aeterna morte animi mei miseria confiterer. dicens.  
quia anima nostra una quodam modo facta fuerat ex duabus. et  
ideo inquam forte mori metuebam. ne totus ille moreretur  
que multum amaram. et illud in libro tertio decimo  
quod duxi summa iustitiae factus inter spirituales aquas superiores  
et corporales inferiores. non satis asseruere dictum est.  
quia res in abscondito est ualere. Hoc opus sic incipit.

**P**rin cipium libri primi

**A**GHVS. ES. domine et laudabilis  
ualere. et magna uirtus tua. et sapientie  
tue non est numerus. Et laudare te ult  
homo aliqua portio creature tue. et homo  
circumferens mortalitates suas. circumferens testimonium  
peccati sui. et testimonium quia superbis resistis. Et tamen

**L**AN

Ex Museo Petri Dubrowsky

## THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND THE ADMONITIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

In a matter of a few days Boethius lost his all. A grandee, first minister, and leader of the Senate, he became a captive awaiting execution. But one thing he retained—his human dignity and philosophy. And in captivity Boethius wrote a treatise, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, that was deservedly considered a testament to posterity and that immortalised his name.

Philosophy, wisdom personified, we see, became Boethius' consoler. She led Boethius back along the labyrinth of his life, tying it up with the fate of the world and with eternity. She held up the torch of knowledge, illuminating the paths that souls follow, "as though drunk", in the search for the truth. Yes, the captive saw Philosophy as a magnificent woman—not an unapproachable and haughty mistress, but a caring and sensitive counsellor to whom one could unburden doubts and pains, and who accompanied seekers in their quest. The more beautiful and profound the meaning that a person attached to wisdom, Boethius wrote, the truer and surer were the steps it laid to the supreme truth.

Here was how Boethius began his tale: a captive abandoned, who had himself abandoned hope, perceived the magnificent Dame Philosophy. She drove away the poetic Muses which disturbed his peace of mind, and helped him understand his own tragedy in the light of the general laws governing the world. This cosmic approach to human existence was Boethius' link with the antique tradition.

Conversing with Philosophy, Boethius passed gradually from specific meditation about his own lot and from specific description of his own misfortunes, which took up much of the first two books of *Consolation*, to an examination of Dame Fortune. Thereupon he and his counsellor discussed the nature of the earthly blessings, leading the reader to the concept of the Supreme Good, as presented in the third book of the treatise, and an understanding of the beneficial nature of the order that reigned in the world.

The fourth book dealt with the theodicies, the rewards and punishments for human deeds. And the fifth examined the relation between Providence, divine knowledge, and free will, that is, the central aspects of metaphysics. Having invoked Philosophy's help in understanding God and the order whereby He arranged the world, the captive regained his calm and was prepared to go to his death with courage.

It was not hard to see that Boethius formulated the set of basic problems which had been at the centre of attention among medieval philosophers. I would say more, medieval treatises have often enough followed the same sequence. Boethius' *Consolation* became that intellectual model which his successors, the medieval philosophers and writers, used in constructing their own works.

It is not simple to classify *Consolation* as to its genre. On the face of it, its title points to its closeness to the "consolatory" works of Cicero and Seneca dating to a few centuries before. But it was also a protreptic, an exhortation. The first two books of the *Consolation* were much like a confession. Gradually, however, the confession turned into a philosophical dialogue or, perhaps, something next to a monologue, reminiscent of Plato's later dialogues.

In the *Consolation*, prose alternated with verse. Boethius, as we see, picked a form fairly rare in the antique literature, that of a *satura*. Only a few Roman writers had resorted to it before Boethius—Varro, a prominent enlightener, Petronius, director of entertainments at Nero's court and author of satirical romances, Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, and the African Neoplatonist Martianus

Capella. And using a *satura* for a "consolatory" piece had no precedent in literature at the time of Boethius. To be sure, writers of a later day, too, avoided this intricate construction. It was not until seven centuries later that Dante Alighieri, a fond admirer of Boethius, resorted to it when writing his *La Vita Nuova*, a collection of 31 love poems with prose commentaries. In sum, the form of the Boethian *Consolation*, which linked verse and prose, or two distinct genres, may be safely regarded as innovative for its time.

Each of Boethius' successive tracts of prose was, in its way, a superstructure upon the one before. The concepts presented in the preceding piece of prose were examined on a new plane, whereupon the verse which followed summed up the content of the piece of prose in brief, effective, sometimes allegorical, lines.

The verse also served as a stepping-stone to new topics. It was charged with meaningful accents and seemed to give a bird's-eye view, as it were, of what had come before. To be sure, Boethius' versified texts were highly diverse as to subject matter and also as to form. He made ample use of something like thirty meters.

The prose was presented as a dialogue between the captive and Philosophy. It was more animated and dynamic in the first two books, but as the subject matter became more complicated, it grew heavier and forfeited its dynamism. On the whole, however, Boethius' prose was undeniably laconic, elegant, and cadenced. *Consolation* abounded in finely drawn images and portraits, its author was obviously a man who saw the world in a poetic light, his frequent references to the antique mythology were mostly lusciously tangible, as, say, the picture of the suffering Orpheus, whose sweet music drew tears from stones. Boethius extolled the great harmony reigning in the universe. He praised the order of the world. And went on to produce pictures of Nature — a tranquil or violent sea, springtime meadows alight with pink flowers, autumn hillsides covered with bunches of grapes, and a breathtaking sunrise. He clarified the most complex and abstract of

matters in philosophical debate, and expressed his thoughts by purely poetical resources with exquisite skill.

His choice of form, the integral structure of *Consolation*, enabled Boethius to deal on two planes, as it were — the psychological and personal, reflecting the inner world and the torment of a captive who must cast off the burden of mundane vanities, who must rise above the injustices and temptations of the outer world, on the one hand, and the philosophical plane, the plane of theory, on the other.

*Consolation* was a great piece of writing, because it was not confined to the author's own ideas. He drew into the conversation such great antique thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus, he cited Homer, Euripides, Parmenides, Cicero, Seneca, and Horace, and he acquainted us with the works of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus. Yes, the sources Boethius cited were numerous. This only confirmed his extraordinary knowledge, and his extensive philosophical education. For it was hardly likely that, in prison, writing the *Consolation*, he had had an opportunity to use the book sources firsthand. And had he not in *Consolation* lamented that his library was out of his reach.

For the Middle Ages, *Consolation* was one of the principal sources of information concerning the antique philosophy and literature.

Boethius' reliance on authorities of past ages had, it is true, elicited charges of eclecticism. Nor was Boethius really an original thinker if original means an entirely novel system of philosophy. But it is only fair to say here that such absolutely self-sustained systems are exceedingly few in history. What Boethius accomplished was to grasp the most essential points of a dying culture, and to reflect them most profoundly and thoroughly, synthesising them in a kind of lasting and universal mould.

He succeeded in fulfilling a task set him at a crossroads in history crucial for future generations, which called for a synthesis of the past in order to foretell the future.

Boethius used elements of the antique knowledge and philosophy as the building material for a new system of thinking, a new culture. He was himself seized by an anticipation of the future, and set about vigorously to help it

grow on soil fertilised by the spiritual labours of many preceding generations. Boethius was a man of his times. But thanks to his intuition he was also at home in the Middle Ages. For many reasons, but chiefly because he had no lack of understanding, and because his genius had shed all mystique. He had a strict logic, his presentation of the most abstruse philosophical ideas was straightforward and comprehensible, and he was "transparently" universal, combining this with an artistic flair for allegory, which clarified rather than obscured the cardinal issues of being, of the world, and of man. Boethius wanted his writing to be understood, and in this he succeeded.

*Consolation* was the most complete presentation of Boethius' philosophical system. His constructions were intimately linked, and the linkage was cemented by his deep knowledge of philosophy and its purposes. These were the point of departure for his constructions and at once the tie between the solutions he offered. While the personified image of Dame Philosophy helped, as I said, to produce an integrated structure, Boethius' knowledge of the subject matter and the purposes of philosophy secured an intrinsic unity and congruence of its philosophical and spiritual compass.

Boethius had dealt with philosophy also in earlier works. And on many occasions. He held that philosophy was the wisdom of subsistence (*sapientia rerum*), love of wisdom (*amor sapientiae*), and apprehension of the truth (*comprehensio veritatis*). He stressed two points in defining philosophy: first, it embodied the objective reasonable nature of the world, and, second, it was the road to knowing the nature of all things. He divided philosophy into active and contemplative. This he had evidently picked up from Aristotle. Theoretical philosophy he subdivided into three orders to fit the three types of existence: physics, the concentrated knowledge of the things indissolubly associated with matter; metaphysics or divine philosophy, which apprehended pure forms, and mathematics, a subject which constituted "intermediate" forms that subsisted both in association with matter and also outside matter.



In his *Consolation*, Boethius enlarged upon this definition of philosophy. He employed artistism to produce an in-depth exposition of the subject and the purposes of philosophy. Indeed, he paraded philosophy in the personified guise of a goddess. This did not prevent him, but rather helped, to produce a more profound and subtle interpretation of the matter at hand. Use of literary means enabled Boethius to show most vividly the conspicuous role he ascribed to philosophy in the life of men.

The verse that opened the *Consolation* produced the picture of a man defeated. Nothing and no one, it seemed, could rescue him from the abyss of despair. The Muses only shared his grief, but the burden of his misadventure pressed down upon him all the same. Then Dame Philosophy came, "her stature uncertain and doubtful, for sometime she exceeded not the common height of men and sometime she seemed to touch the heavens with her head and if she lifted it up to the highest she pierced the very heavens, so that she could not be seen by the beholders".<sup>1</sup>

Boethius went on to relate that Philosophy's imperishable garments, which she had woven herself, were adorned with the letter *pi* at the bottom, and the letter *theta* at the top. Between them were what could be described as rungs of a ladder. The letters stood for the two branches of philosophy — the active and the contemplative.

The active or practical was the base upon which reposed the grand edifice of the contemplative or theoretical philosophy aspiring to knowledge of the highest laws of being. The rungs symbolising the ladder of cognition stood for the path of knowing the truth, a path that led upwards from the propositions of practical philosophy, from ethical topics, to the uppermost spheres of the contemplative philosophy, the doctrine on the First Cause of being. The ascent from the lower to the higher, from practical ethics to the science of the world, and from there to the production of theodicies — that, in Boethius' view, was the central line in the development of philosophy, and at once cemented it. Yes, Boethius' reasoning formed a closely welded system governed not only by this structural, but also by the semantic rule. To him philosophical learn-

ing was like a ladder that led ultimately to apprehension of the divine essence and assimilation of the highest good.

He saw the objective purpose of philosophy in knowing human and divine things, and held, at the same time, that it is not only positive knowledge, but also the process of knowing. This process, Boethius interpreted in the spirit of Plato's philosophy. First, reason cognises earthly being, that is material things dealt with in practical (or active) philosophy. Thereupon it cognizes the laws governing the universe and heaven, and the movement of the heavenly bodies, expressing this in numerals that represent the subject of mathematics. Not before this is reason illuminated by the supreme truth.

At the same time, Boethius informs us, knowledge was the awakening of images that reposed in the soul ever since it was associated with the divine essence. The highest knowledge resided in the Divine Reason, which contained the pure forms and First Cause of all things.

This Platonic interpretation combined with certain ideas of the Peripatetic school, and in particular Aristotle's theory of abstraction. Boethius held that the activity of reason was preceded by bodily suffering, the outside stimulator of the soul's cognitive faculty.

The faculties of apprehending the surrounding world by the senses, the imagination, and reason, were set strictly apart from each other. None but God could apprehend the pure forms. There were, indeed, Boethius held, as many grades of knowledge as there were subsistences. When determining the truth, it was more correct to consider whatever flowed from the evidence of reason rather than the senses or the imagination (a view familiar to us from theological treatises). The theory of knowledge in the *Consolation* was a summing up of Boethius' many years of search. His constructions show how to proceed from Aristotle's postulates and arrive at conclusions in the spirit of Platonic philosophy. Indeed, this happened fairly frequently with the medieval masters of logic as well.

The IX Canto from the 3rd Book, in which Boethius portrayed the Cosmos and spoke of the origin and structure of the world, mainly on Plato's model in the *Timaeus*,

is probably fundamental as a key to his ontological ideas. God, Boethius said, imparted being to all subsistences, created it as a demiurge, the artificer of the world, that is, organiser of the vastness of the chaotic matter (not as the Christian God, who created the world out of nothing). This last point is the fundamental distinction between the reasoning of Boethius the philosopher and the Christian concept. God contains the model, the archetype of all subsistence, whereby He arranges being in marvellous order, that is, harmonises the Earth and shapes the Universe. This process is carried out at first in theoretical mathematical terms (with the help of numerals), and thereupon through the World Soul, which is the intermediary between God and Nature. The eternal archetypes become congruent with unorganised matter. It is thus animated, and acquires genuine being.

Like Plato, Boethius likens the souls of people to a light chariot that returns to its abode, the source of all things, the Pure Reason, once it has performed the ordained round of being.

It seems to me, however, that when constructing this imposing cosmological picture, to which he added finishing touches in a number of cantos and pieces of prose in the *Consolation*, Boethius fell under the influence of Chalcidius, the Latin translator and commentator of Plato's *Timaeus*, who backed up the examination of the world's being by positing Divine Reason that made all things move towards its goal, the Supreme Good or God. This occurs as an immutable law in every thing, and acts at the same time as the motivating impulse of being. "Thou, O Ruler, art the beginning and the end of all things, the whole purpose of being!"<sup>2</sup> Thus Boethius asserts the existential being of the First Cause and the Divine nature of the world, thereby unconsciously betraying his pantheistic vision of the world. Perhaps it was under Boethius' influence that Johannes Scotus Erigena, too, apprehended the world order in these terms, gravitating towards a merging of God and the world.

The unity of all things in the world are made closer, as Boethius sees it, because God is the Supreme Goodness

which is also the perfect state, the aggregate of all good-nesses. Being congruent in its existence with the Supreme Good, all things from the loftiest intelligible substances down to the last of creatures, plants or stones, are bearers of that Good. The world is beneficent, Boethius maintains in line with the antique philosophical tradition, and objectively contrary to the Christian dualism. This beneficence, indeed, is the foundation for the integral unity of all subsistence.

Though he identifies the Supreme Good with God, Boethius also cites interesting evidence of Divine Being, backing it both logically and ontologically. In the eyes of logic, the Supreme Good or God is the most perfect category. And ontologically, it is the beginning and the purpose of hierarchically constructed Being.

This double proof (associated with Platonic tradition) was accepted by the medieval Christian theologians, especially in the 15th century. Since the First Cause of subsistence, the cause of being and its purpose, is invested solely in God, a closed circle arises, which determines both the structure of the world and the fate of people. In the Neoplatonist spirit, Boethius considers God or the Supreme Good as the One. Each manifestation of subsistence, each individual, is an agglomeration (unity) of certain elements or components that is unique, that makes the subsistence or individual what he is, and not different, comprising his essence and representing his true existence. By so doing, Boethius formulates yet another point of importance for medieval philosophy about the distinctions between essence, being, and existence.

This distinction is not valid as concerns God, who is the Absolute. He is the One, indivisibly simple and integral, ruling out all complexity and composition. That is the fundamental distinction between God and all other subsistences which result from the emanation of the One. At the same time, the whole universal order seeks to return to Unity.

These ideas, as put forward by Boethius, betray an influence of the debates held by followers of Plotinus and Proclus, who were both conspicuous Neoplatonists.

Hence Boethius' conception of divine predetermination, fate, and free will—an idea which had a most substantial influence on medieval thinkers. There had been a long discussion of these issues of a patristical nature, and, evidently, Boethius knew their content. What strikes the eye is that he examined them under a somewhat different angle than Augustine, who produced a fundamentally Christian interpretation of the issue of free will, delving into human emotions and temptations, noting that man is capable of choosing between good and evil, and pointing out that this ability is linked with divine grace.

Boethius tackled the problem first of all on an ontological and gnosiological plane, drawing a line between eternity as God's attribute and the temporal principle as the attribute of everything He created, thus giving it a cosmic thrust in the spirit of pagan Neoplatonism. Boethius described eternity as "a perfect possession of an altogether endless life".<sup>3</sup> (This definition was later borrowed by Thomas Aquinas, who set it down in his *Summa Theologiae*.)

The essence of God is simple and immovable.

Time is related to the beginning of motion and fragmentation, that is, to the division of the One. The image, the ideal model, which reposes in the simplicity of the Divine Reason, is Providence, and everything emanating from it belongs to the realm of time. God arranges this through fate. Setting apart the domains of Providence and fate, Boethius emphasised that, given the hierarchic structure of the world, the farther something is from the simplicity of the Divine Reason, the more exposed it is to the workings of fate. In other words, dependence on fate increases with the increasing distance from God, the Centre. Boethius likens this to the spreading rings on a water surface.

And though, prompted by the Stoics, Boethius maintained that fate determined people's actions by an indestructible chain of causes that originated in the immobility of Providence, he did make a logical move and tried to prove that free will existed. Here is how he reasoned.

A creature possessing reason can distinguish between

good and bad since knowledge of goodness is implanted in the soul from the beginning. Consequently, a reasonable being is capable of wanting something and rejecting something. God possesses the Supreme Knowledge. This knowledge shrinks gradually as the distance between things and the divine First Cause increases. The distinctive properties of the substances close to God, substances beneath Providence are perceptive judgement, infallible will, and congruence between wishes and the ability to attain them. Human souls are more free when they are in their prime source than enclosed in the dungeon of the body. They are totally enslaved if people indulge in vice, for then they lose all knowledge and thus forfeit their predestination. Setting apart the realms of divine and human knowledge, Boethius maintained that people possessed free will in relation to their own knowledge. This meant that they were answerable for their actions, and that therefore reward and punishment was justifiable. Providence, on the other hand, lacked unconditional necessity, and could be avoided. It amounted to a foreknowledge of the Supreme Reason and was the First Cause of subsistence.

In short, in Boethius' *Consolation* the absoluteness of Providence was reconciled with the free will of human beings. Man was the more unfree the more prone he was to vice. As he improved himself he came closer to the Supreme Reason, and thereby escaped the necessary law of fate, and became entirely free upon returning to his prime source when liberated from earthly being. To gain perfection, he gathered knowledge and exercised his virtues.

The striving for virtue was an act of free will. Boethius fell back on subtle philosophical arguments to settle the crucial theological problem of whether or not free will could exist in the presence of providential predetermination.

Boethius' concept of Fortune was especially popular in the Middle Ages. The puzzle of that blind and whimsical giver of happiness had excited man for millennia, because man was ever eager to "harness" that uncompliant goddess. Boethius portrayed Fortune as a force through

which order was maintained in the world, and at the same time as a goddess. He cited the "vulgar" popular notion of Fortune as a goddess with a "lying face" who bestowed gifts on people to suit her own whimsy, a sorceress who assumed a variety of deceitful guises, who showered gifts on a person or flung him into the pit of despair—and opposed this image with a philosophical examination of the essence of that which is called Fortune, striving to depict its fickleness as a natural manifestation.

Boethius defined Fortune's "right", comparing it with the laws of natural phenomena, their alternation and repetition.

"It is lawful for the heaven to bring forth fair days, and to hide them again in darksome nights," he wrote. "It is lawful for the year sometime to compass the face of the earth with flowers and fruits, and sometime to cover it with clouds and cold. The sea hath right sometime to fawn with calms, and sometime to frown with storms and waves... This is my force, this is the sport which I continually use. I turn about my wheel with speed and take a pleasure to turn things upside down. Ascend, if thou wilt, but with this condition, that thou thinkest it not an injury to descend when the course of my sport so requireth."<sup>4</sup>

The winds of Fortune only appear to change without cause; their inner essence is the same as that of natural transformations subject to the divine law that governs the world. Inconstancy and mortality are unfailing conditions for being in this world, where changes occur with enviable constancy. They, too, become stable in the rotation of Nature as established by God. Fortune, Boethius wrote, was manifestation of nature's order in human existence. The goodnesses bestowed by it, like the misadventures, belonged neither to Fortune nor to Man. They were concrete manifestations of the general order reigning in the world, perceivable by people in their immediate emanation and suffered by them psychologically. Constancy was foreign not only to the nature of Fortune, but also to that of man.

The symbol of Fortune, identified with Nature, is a rap-

idly rotating wheel—a favourite image in the antique, and thanks to Boethius largely also in the medieval, world. The revolutions of the wheel of Fortune, symbolising the great rotation of the world, were implacable, though they never predetermined winnings in advance, for to that wheel all people were equal. By linking Fortune and divine Providence, the fickleness of Nature and the absolute constancy of the One God, Boethius created the classical medieval concept of Fate and Fortune, pressed into the service of divine Providence.

Subsistence examined in the simplicity of the Supreme Reason was called Providence, Boethius observed, while that to which it imparted motion, i. e. the world as such, was arranged by God through the medium of Fate. Providence and Fate existed and functioned at different levels. Providence governed the world of pure forms, and was possessed by God who resided in eternity. Providence or the image of the world in God's mind, on the one hand, and the world as such, embarked on the path of time, on the other, were connected by Fate, which no longer was Providence but had not yet become the concrete world. "Fate," Boethius wrote, "is a disposition inherent in changeable things, by which Providence connecteth all things in their order."<sup>5</sup> Whatever was subject to Fate, was also obedient to Providence, to which Fate, too, was subordinate. It was through Fate that the world was, in fact, governed. In specific human lives, however, upon the surface of things, Fate might manifest itself as Fortune. That was how Boethius reasoned, and in due course his reasoning became the *leitmotif* of Dante's paean to Fortune in the *Divine Comedy*:

*What is this Fortune which thou speaks of,  
That has the world's goods so within its clutches?...  
She makes provision, judges, and pursues  
Her governance, as theirs the other gods.  
Her permutations have not any truce;  
Necessity makes her precipitate,  
So often cometh who his turn obtains  
And this is she who is so crucified*



*Even by those who ought to give her praise,  
Giving her blame amiss, and bad repute.  
But she is blissful, and she hears it not;  
Among the other primal creatures gladsome  
She turns her sphere, and blissful she rejoices.*

Boethius' ethical ideal was a sage like Socrates. But it was no "superman" ideal like the one nourished by the Stoics. Any person, Boethius held, could become such an ideal with the help of philosophy. A person acquired a certain degree of perfection as concerned knowledge and virtue, and thereby accomplished the purpose of being, rising above the being of the changeable and mortal world. He vanquished death, since he acquired eternal life in his First Source.

Boethius thus imparted harmony to man's existence by including him within the sphere of the godly universe. His talk about virtues, rewards and punishments, was interwoven with the above conception. Each person was given that which might to best advantage bring him closer to the Supreme Goodness. And each person could acquire only that which belonged to him by nature. Vice-ridden people, if they went unpunished, were more unhappy, because punishment would have distanced them from evil and brought them closer to the source of goodness.

Happiness and evil, Boethius wrote in his *Consolation*, were incompatible. Typically, he did not raise the issue of the posthumous fate of any individual soul, nor of God's judgement and the related issues that were troubling Christian theologians. Boethius maintained as a true philosopher that a man of virtue received the best of all rewards, the reward of goodness, because if "goodness is bliss, all good people become blissful just because they are good".<sup>6</sup> Completely in Plato's spirit, Boethius thereupon maintained that "the recipients of bliss become gods, as it were".<sup>7</sup> This was hardly a slip of the tongue, but oh how many worlds removed from the Christian doctrine! Indeed, we find not a single reference to the Bible, not a single substantial Christian reminiscence, in *Consolation of Philosophy*.

The pagan, essentially Neoplatonist, orientation of Boethius' last treatise, is quite obvious. One could argue till the end of time whether the author of *Consolation* had intended to write a second part and there continue examining the issues he had raised in the light of Christian theology (and had not done so because his life was cut off). That, at least, is the view of some scholars. But I wonder if a really devout person, a true Christian awaiting execution and summing up his life, could have written a treatise that did not at any point even address itself to Jesus Christ. No, I think it was much more likely that in spirit, Christianity was and remained foreign to Boethius the philosopher.

Yet, it will not be enough to register only the philosophical worth of the *Consolation*. In any case, its philosophical worth cannot fully explain the lively interest evoked by the treatise for so many centuries. The reason for that is deeper: the main theme of the treatise is the everlasting fight and indissoluble linkage between Fate and Wisdom, whose secret so many great minds had tried to uncover at different times in history and that never failed to excite people meditating about the meaning of life.

The *Consolation* was written by a man who knew that death was waiting. He was a man who had enjoyed all the mundane goodnesses, a man who had attained a top place in society, a man who lost everything when those who envied him his fortune raised false charges against him. At the peak of his fame he was reputed to be the most enlightened, the cleverest. And, indeed, facing death, he proved this to be the case. In his agony, he did not plead for mercy either before his earthly ruler, Theodoric, or the ruler in heaven, Jesus Christ, whom he did not even mention in his *Consolation*. The latter point was most unusual, considering that Christianity had been the dominant religion then for all of two centuries, and that Boethius was in truly tragic circumstances.

Boethius reached out across the limits of his earthly existence to the sphere of perfect being, to find the Supreme Truth — for all subsistence was directly dependent

on that sphere, which was also the Highest and the Absolute Goodness, the Pure Reason, which imparted a reflected knowledge of itself to human souls and thereby prompted them to seek perfection and self-comprehension.

Man was not led by any mystic Revelation, by any irrational faith, as he aspired to the genuine good, to bliss, to the highest goal and the First Cause of subsistence. The road a man must take was that of philosophy, based on consistently constructive knowledge, knowledge moving from the examination of natural phenomena to the examination of "intelligible" species, and thereupon rising and contemplating the eternal ideas. Thereby he withdrew from the realm where brutal and perfidious Fortune ruled the day. Wisdom helped man understand that God's absolute knowledge was momentary in time, that it disposed of the entirety of the past, present and future, and that it was not a rigid predetermination but only a "preknowledge" or "prevision" of the free acts of human volition. It was not an inescapable and ordained condition. Nor did it restrict man's freedom to decide for himself.

Boethius dealt with the relation between Man and Fate on a cosmic scale in the tradition of classic philosophical culture and with special care for the Platonic and Stoic conceptions.

Fate, Boethius said, blended the great diversity of temporal phenomena, and gave direction to their motion. But their true link, the link that made the world integral and harmonious, was a force as great, for it was love, love which "rules land and sea, and even the skies above".<sup>8</sup> A few hundred years later, the great Dante would repeat what Boethius said: "The love which moves the sun and the other stars."<sup>9</sup>

Fate, wisdom, and love — for Boethius these were cosmic powers contending with each other and not contending, powers that made the world and humans one entity. All subsistence had its place in the harmonious Cosmos. Man was the highest link in the hierarchy of earthly exist-

ence. His body belonged to the "lower" world, while his spirit raced upward to the Eternal Truth.

Evil had no place in the benign world, even though it might be a cosmic power. What man fancied to be evil and unjust, was not really so. It only appeared evil because the true sense of what was going on was concealed from man. Boethius strove to prevail on the reader that whatever looked evil served a good purpose in the higher sense. And the arguments whereby Boethius backed his point were logically convincing.

Human pain throbbed in *Consolation* amid philosophical arguments. Nor did Boethius deny that suffering overcame him which wisdom could not console. He, the philosopher, combatted doubt. He was convinced a sage could not be unhappy, for the aim of wisdom was true happiness, a state of bliss.

Only an unreasonable and lazy soul could grieve continuously. The sage would spurn misadventure. It was wrong to avoid the blows of fate. One had to understand the specious visages of Fortune, and step forward to meet it without fear of death. It was obvious to Boethius that this did not mean struggle against fate or submission to fate. The sage learned the substance of fate, its hidden meaning, and by so doing broke out of the circle of temporal phenomena where it held power.

The atmosphere of fate, of inevitability, which enshrouded any man who was preoccupied with earthly cares, tended to disappear as soon as he entrusted his cares to wisdom. To be truly happy, to be powerful, to live without fear of the blows of fate or the winds of fortune — this was possible only within the compass of knowledge directed to the Supreme Idea, and this through self-perfection. "Fortune will never make those things thine which by the appointment of Nature belong not to thee," wrote Boethius.<sup>10</sup> What he had in mind was not only the external good, but also the spiritual essence of the human being who depreciated or justified his life, a speck in the infinite motion of being.

The means to attain bliss was not poverty of spirit but rather the opposite, Boethius held (contrary to the Chris-

tian view). Not restrictions and humility but true wisdom, not passive virtue but moral purpose led man to happiness. To overcome misfortune, man had to be more perfect than fate. Those who unfailingly reside upon the summit of their souls can eventually be happy. But saying this, Boethius did not emit a superficial kind of optimism, the optimism of someone who did not know the consequences of his actions. His optimism was that of a sage fully conscious of his responsibility to the present and future. And that was the source of the tremendous moral power of *Consolation of Philosophy* for many future generations.

The life and death of Boethius asserted the truths he had proclaimed. Soon after his execution, an unknown poet inscribed the following on his grave: "Here lies Boethius, interpreter and fledgling of Philosophy who had earned glory reaching to the stars. He is extolled in Latium and grieved in vanquished Greece. The monstrous act of the tyrant has not led to Boethius' perdition. His body may be covered with earth, but his name will live down the ages!"

People read *Consolation* in the Latin original with the greatest pleasure ever since it first appeared and until the advent of modern times. Still, a relatively few educated people could do so; to begin with, they had to know Latin, a language which, though it became the official tongue of the medieval civilisation in Western Europe, was not universally known. True, translations and paraphrases had begun appearing even in the early Middle Ages in as yet only burgeoning national languages. In the 9th century, for example, Anglo-Saxon King Alfred translated it into Old English, a living language at that time.

Since those days, the Last of the Romans' writings exercised a strong influence on the emergence of European literatures in dialects spoken by the developing nations of those days. At the junction of the 10th and 11th centuries, *Consolation* was translated into High German by Notker Labeo. In the 11th century a Provence version appeared,

and the 12th witnessed a truly enormous interest in Boethius. His authority in science, logic, philosophy, poetry and music was tremendous. The many French paraphrases of *Consolation* were crowned in the 13th century with a translation into French by Jean de Meung. There were several translations into Italian, one of them by Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini, and another, in the 14th century, by Albert of Florence.

Boethius' writings were also widely read in the Byzantine Empire in a Greek translation by Maximus Planudes (in the 14th century). That was the time, too, when Chaucer made a new English translation. Among Boethius' translators was Queen Elizabeth I of England. Yes, Shakespearean England got to know that Last of the Romans very well.

There were also many versions (recastings) of *Consolation* in the new European languages, some of them inexact but serving in their way as "pop" literature.

Why did all those crowned monarchs, all those scholars and poets, translate or recast Boethius? For one thing, the knowledge that Boethius imparted was an element in the obligatory intellectual "expertise" that people sought to have both in the early and late Middle Ages. An educated person in medieval Western Europe simply had to know Boethius. To know him well, to have one's own judgement of him, was a token of learnedness, an element of cultural prestige. And to acquire this knowledge one had to study *Consolation* in the original, especially in the late Middle Ages when knowledge of Latin was itself a sign of belonging to the cultural elite.

It seems to me that the translators and recasters of *Consolation* wanted it to reach a broader range of readers, to bring it up to date through the medium of their own language. They wanted the association between the treatise and its readers to be more intimate, more human. It thus became an effective element of their contemporary culture.

Alfred the Great, king of the West Saxons, who cared not only for the wellbeing but also the spiritual soundness of his people, felt that nothing could be better than *Conso-*

lation for the edification of his subjects. Any person who read it obtained an idea of the macrocosm and microcosm, acquiring universal knowledge, taking in admonitions as to the way to live a virtuous life, imbibing poetic allegory, and mollifying the miseries of his soul. How uninhibited Alfred's own appreciation of *Consolation* was, may be judged by the fact that in his translation Fortune was the living image of the Germanic peoples' idea of Fate, and that he substituted examples from German mythology and Anglo-Saxon history for Boethius' examples from Roman mythology and history. If King Alfred had been translating *Consolation* for himself alone, he would hardly have resorted to such expedients. Obviously, he wanted to make it as comprehensible to a wider audience as possible.

Notker, the scholar of Saint Gall's Monastery, was convinced that any acquired knowledge was more lasting if learned in the native tongue rather than Latin. (We may observe here that for those times his opinion was unusually progressive.) He was concerned about the fidelity of the translation and took pains to find German equivalents for Latin concepts. This translation of *Consolation* was widely circulated in Germany right up to the 15th century. Mind you, interest in the treatise continued in Germany until the 18th century when Sofie-Charlotte, spouse of Frederick I, a lady who befriended the great Leibniz, saw to its publication in a new German translation. (Sofie-Charlotte herself, by the way, tried to translate it into French.)

The translation of Boethius into Provençal at the junction of the 10th and 11th centuries may be said to have given impulse to troubadour poetry. The latter reflected the sparkle of the ancient classical culture, and Boethius deserved credit for it. His Dame Philosophy bore features of the Fair Lady of Provençal poetry.

Jean de Meung, who lived in the 13th century when West European culture was being affected by the ongoing philosophico-theological struggle, accentuated the philosophical and theistical aspects of *Consolation* in his translation. He took delight in Boethius' allegories, imparting

to them a wellnigh theatrical splendour in the spirit of his times.

Elizabeth, Queen of England, followed in Chaucer's footsteps and perceived *Consolation* as a highly humane piece of writing which compounded poetry and philosophy.

To be sure, beginning in the 6th century, there appeared an enormous number of imitations and recastings of Boethius' *Consolation*, and also other writings where the topics he had raised were variously treated. It is safe to say that, all in all, Boethius was a companion and participant in the cultural process of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, for in those days he was remembered, studied, and known. Nor does this apply exclusively to special fields of culture such as philosophy, literature, and music. More importantly, this contributed to broadening the vision and appreciation of the world at large.

His thoughts, images, and allegories, even though they lost this identity in the retelling, became an element of public shows and stereotypes of public thinking.

Even a brief listing of all the imitations and recastings of Boethius would have taken up a big part of this book. So let us deal with only the most important ones.

Isidore of Seville put out his *Synonyms* in the early half of the 7th century, calling on people to acquire self-knowledge and to combat evil even at the cost of their lives. Boethius' influence was clearly traceable. His chords resounded in the prose and meter of the Carolingian Renaissance. The Dame Philosophy enchanted not only scholars but also poets in the 11th and 12th centuries. That was when Simund Frein wrote his *Romance of Philosophy* and Petrus of Compostela his *Consolation of the Mind*. Wisdom and Reason, Nature and Love, the Virtues and Fortune wandered across the pages of the many manuscripts of those days, and it was Boethius who had started it.

The great Dante referred continually to Boethius. His *La Vita Nuova* was constructed on the model of *Consolation*. Elsewhere, in *Feast*, he produced seventeen reminiscences from *Consolation*. Some of Boethius' ideas were also



treated in *The Divine Comedy*, where Francesca da Rimini quoted Boethius as she spoke of her tragic love affair, while Dante himself shaped his lines to suit Boethius' conception of fate and the world order, and the appearance of his Beatrice, the personification of wisdom, was highly reminiscent of Dame Philosophy's in Boethius' piece.

The eminent scholars Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Robert Grosseteste nicknamed Greathead, Peter of Pisa, and Nicholas of Paris drew on the thoughts that they found in the writings of that Last of the Romans. And Roger Bacon, that distinguished 13th-century man of learning, knew the works of Boethius thoroughly and drew upon them in his own writings.

During the Renaissance, Boethius was still ranked among the acknowledged authorities. Petrarch was one of his admirers. He wrote an imitation of his *Consolation*, and elaborated on his concept of Fortune. Boethius was the favourite writer of Boccaccio. He was also the favourite writer of Chaucer, who, not content to having translated *Consolation* into English, also carried over its humanistic *motifs*, its high appreciation of man, and the Fortune topic, into his own writings.

The life story of Thomas More, the English humanist, was in some ways reminiscent of Boethius' own tragic story. There was the same fondness of scholarly pursuits, the same brilliant career, and at its end the same accusation of high treason, and the same inexorable execution. When held captive in the Tower, More wrote his peculiar imitation of *Consolation*, which, however, was far more religious in tenor than the treatise of the Last of the Romans.

William Shakespeare, as we know, had had no proper education. We cannot tell whether or not he had read Boethius. Though he must have had some knowledge of him owing to the latter's popularity in his time and among his circle of friends. It is quite safe to say, therefore, that a whole range of topics and personages that were typical for Boethius and had become "common-place" by Shakespeare's time appeared in the great poet's works too, such as Fortune and Love, human magna-

nimity, man's nature, the impossible linking of happiness and vice, and so on. Let me quote a few lines from *Hamlet* to make my point:

*A man that fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hath ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those  
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled  
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger.*

Boethius also had a readership in modern times, and has one today. His first printed edition appeared in 1473 in Nuremberg, and his *Consolation* had seen numerous printings since. It was translated several times into English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. New editions have been put out in the 20th century as well. His *Consolation* was known to, and appreciated by, eminent figures in European culture, among them Anatole France, and the poets of the early 20th century.

The Last of the Romans' moral example and humanistic ideals have lost none of their universal impact today, too.

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### THREE DEFEATS OR THE HAPPY LIFE OF FLAVIUS CASSIODORUS

In November 1528, Thomas More, the renowned author of *Utopia*, received a letter from a friend, which read: "In the library of St. Stephan, I found a small book, a chronicle, by Cassiodorus; it bears the mark of Roman nobility and merits the attention of all enlightened people."<sup>1</sup> These words are consonant with those of humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam, never one to be overgenerous with praise: "I readily number Cassiodorus among the happy and distinguished — a man of such high rank and such good fortune, so learned and so pious, but I cannot altogether approve of his embracing all the sciences both sacred and profane, in his writings."<sup>2</sup>

The enigma of Cassiodorus caused many an eminent figure of the Renaissance to marvel. It was hard to understand how such an ideal man could have existed, combining in one person a successful statesman and extensively educated seeker of the truth, a man who tracked the secrets of the universe and was at peace with himself and with the people around him, and who lived to an age of nearly a hundred, retaining lucidity of mind, a will to work, and good humour.

The life of Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus, called the Senator (c. 490-c. 585), inscribed a vivid page into the history of a turbulent period that abounded in extraordinary men. He was born when Italy was ruled by Odo-

cer, chief of a group of Germanic tribes who had seized power after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in A. D. 476. Cassiodorus spent his childhood in the family estate in the south of Italy, where only faint echoes were heard of the political and religious struggles between Byzantium and the Throne of St. Peter, and also only faint echoes of the battles fought between the warriors of Odoacer and Theodoric, chief of the Ostrogoths, who both sought possession of the fertile Apennine lands.

Backed by Constantinople, Theodoric, semi-literate but forceful and far-sighted, became king of the Ostrogoths after the assassination of Odoacer. The kingdom of the Ostrogoths had begun claiming supremacy among the other barbarian kingdoms that were springing up upon the ruins of the Western Roman Empire ever since the early 6th century.

The kingdom of the Ostrogoths survived for nearly 60 years. And for more than 30 of these Cassiodorus served its rulers faithfully, eager to buttress the new state. During this period, the Ostrogothic kingdom lived through a period of prosperity under Theodoric (A. D. 493-526), devastating wars with the Byzantine Empire, and a series of ferocious clashes with the Franks. A keen political and social struggle went on interminably with religious and ethnic strife flaring up time and again across the country. The associates and opponents of Cassiodorus came and went. While he, a politician with a goodly share of luck, remained at the helm of power. Rulers and claimants to the throne, locked in struggle, needed him. He was equally appreciated by the chiefs of the Ostrogoths, the Byzantine emperors, and the papal throne.

When the kingdom's downfall under the onslaught of the Byzantine Empire became foregone conclusion, Cassiodorus retired from the affairs of state, and devoted himself to scholarship. And the results of his efforts would become a model for the Middle Ages. Surviving the kingdom of the Ostrogoths by more than a quarter of a century, Cassiodorus lived out his life among students and followers on

his family estate, while the north and centre of the peninsula were overrun by the Langobards.

Cassiodorus' career as statesman began in 507, when he was appointed the king's quaestor, or secretary, one of the most conspicuous offices at the royal court, when still a very young man. Among his duties was to compose Theodoric's letters and rescripts. The king, a semi-literate person, did as much as he could to gain the reputation of a patron of science and the arts. As I have already said, cultural life in Italy was visibly stimulated during the years of his rule. Theodoric went out of his way to pick the men in his service not only among those who were loyal, but above all among those who had proved themselves capable statesmen.

Theodoric noticed Flavius Cassiodorus when the latter, suiting the custom of his time, recited a panegyric in his honour. Its elegance was duly commended, and settled the young man's future. Little was known about the new quaestor. He was from a fairly rich provincial family that had come from Syria to the south of Italy at the end of the 3rd or in the early 4th century. (Throughout his life Cassiodorus showed a touching affection for the place of his birth, taking every possible opportunity, even writing official letters, to extol its beauty.) It cannot be said that the Cassiodorus' family was of great and noble stock. The vain Cassiodorus repeatedly engaged in a genealogical search but failed to trace his family back by more than four generations. He set forth his autobiographical information in his *Ordo Generis Cassiodorum*, a fragment of which was discovered by A. Holder and published by H. Usener in 1877. Cassiodorus' grandfather, it was said, had gone with Pope Leo I to beg the ferocious Attila, chief of the Huns, to spare Rome. And his father was chief of the Praetorian Guard under Odoacer.

Cassiodorus wrote of his ancestors: "An ancient family, glorious ancestors clad in togas, I would single them out among other powerful men due to their exuberant health and tallness."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Cassiodorus inherited the excellent health of his ancestors and lived to the age of nearly a hundred.

Since the Cassiodoruses were "new people" on Roman soil, the king's quaestor was not always able to conceal his envy in face of the glory of the aristocratic elite, such as the clan of the Anicii.

Cassiodorus had many indisputable virtues: he could express his own and other people's thoughts most exquisitely and had no equal for this among his contemporaries. His quick mind, his shrewdness and organisational ability came to light early in his career in the office of *magister officiorum* (from 526) and prefect (from 533).

Cassiodorus had a knack for getting on with people and finding a way out of any situation. He was eager to reconcile Italy and Byzantium, the history of unconquerable Rome with the history of the barbarian peoples. He wanted to reconcile orthodox Christians with the Arians, and pagan knowledge with the Gospel. This largely explains the fact, unprecedented in those turbulent days, of his nearly 40 years in the upper echelon of power.

This ability to be irreplaceable and yet stay in the shade was displayed by Cassiodorus when he was still very young. Despite the difference in age, to say nothing of office, young Cassiodorus became a friend and frequent adviser of Theodoric, who enjoyed spending his leisure hours in the young man's company.

Pressure of time and his numerous duties were an obstacle to Cassiodorus' improving himself as a rhetorician. In the preface to his most important treatise, the *Variae*, he complained: "Poets are given nine years to produce their work, while I have not got even an hour or a minute. The moment I begin something, I am interrupted, and I have to do something in haste, while whatever I had begun cannot be completed with the requisite care... How can you ask for eloquent messages in these circumstances if I barely have time to choose the needed words!"<sup>4</sup>

But even in those years, with his fine Roman education, Cassiodorus gravitated towards scientific pursuits. He was fond of Greek and Roman antique culture, he understood it well, he continuously added to his knowledge, and communicated with the most enlightened of his contemporaries, notably Symmachus and Boethius.

The emergence of feudal relations in Italy, previously the heart of the slave world, was very slow. And attended by an interlacement of old and new traditions. The situation in the Ostrogothic kingdom was complicated by ethnic strife between the conquered population and the conquerors, and by religious differences between the Catholics, who were Italian, and the Arians, who were Gothic. Two systems of law—the Roman and the Gothic—were thought to have functioned in the country at that time. Contemporaries noted that the king of the Ostrogoths ruled simultaneously over two peoples—the Romans and the Goths. In that situation, Theodoric was intent on tightening the alliance with the Romans and securing continuity of the Roman traditions. He made this the basic principle of his policy. And his successors mostly followed in his footsteps. Cassiodorus was chief ideologue of the Gothic and Roman alliance.

In A. D. 519, according to Roman custom, Theodoric's son-in-law and heir apparent, Eutharic, was chosen consul. That was another illustration of how consistently the alliance of Goths and Romans was being carried into effect. The occasion was sumptuously celebrated. There was a feast for the townsmen and enormous public shows. Cassiodorus' *Chronica*, a brief excursus into the history of Rome and the rest of the world, and whose list of consuls duly included Eutharic, was an important propaganda action.

That the heir to the Gothic throne was made a Roman consul Cassiodorus depicted as the beginning of a new chapter in world history—but still a chapter that flowed organically from Rome's heroic past. Cassiodorus did not mince words to classify the Goths as "one of the history-making nations"—something that had in the minds of Roman historians of many generations been an attribute of the Romans only.

The *Chronica*, which was no more than a compilation by nature, did not arouse any special interest among Cassiodorus' contemporaries. It yielded hardly any new factual material. Still, its ideological orientation was of some interest.

Like previous writings of the same type, Cassiodorus' *Chronica* reposed on the synchronous principle borrowed from the Christian historians who were Cassiodorus' predecessors, notably Eusebius of Caesarea. It started with the times of the legendary Assyrian king Ninus, husband of Semiramis, with the history of the Latins, the ancient Romans, opening with the reign of Aeneas, who won Lavinia, daughter of Latinus, an aboriginal king, after a long war, and, inheriting Latinus' kingdom on the latter's death, founded the kingdom of Lavinium. The list of Rome's rulers in the *Chronica* opens with Romulus.

The *Chronica* was written on the model of the traditional Roman *fasti*. As the narrative approached Cassiodorus' own times, its propaganda aims became ever more apparent. Referring to Roman Emperor Trajanus Decius, for example, who had inscribed black pages into Roman history with his brutal persecution of Christians, Cassiodorus faithfully commends the Goths for having killed him in battle in Thrace and thereby ridding the world of an ogre.<sup>5</sup>

We know from other sources, too, that Emperor Claudius II (Gothicus) had crushed the Goths near Naissus, Moesia (in 271), while Cassiodorus was evasive and casually referred to his victory over barbarians.

In respect of the year 287, Cassiodorus noted the spread of Manicheism, but avoided all mention of the Arianism professed by the Goths. Sidestepping the explosive religious issues, he referred exclusively to the Christian faith, and avoided the more common term used by his predecessors in similar cases, the Catholic faith. He did not hesitate, too, to distort the outcome of the battle between Stilicho and the Goths in 402, saying the latter had won it. And the stance taken by Cassiodorus becomes more than clear when we read in his *Chronica* of Alaric's magnanimity and kindness, though the Gothic king had consigned Rome to total plunder.

Cassiodorus went out of his way (with Theodoric's approval, I reckon) to minimise the contradictions between East and West and, what is more, even emphasised what



he termed the pre-eminent role of the Eastern Roman Empire. That, at least, was the light in which he portrayed the relations between emperors Theodosius and Valentinian.<sup>6</sup>

He endeavoured to show thereby that it was quite within the traditional East-West practice that Theodoric received the purple out of the hands of Justinian I, emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, and that this was just another in the chain of historical precedents. Typically, too, Cassiodorus included Eastern emperors in the column headed 'Emperors of Rome'.

Speaking of A. D. 451, Cassiodorus pointed out that in the battle on the Catalaunian Plains on the Marne the Romans had fought under Aëtius alongside Gothic auxiliaries against the Huns. To be fair, however, we must remember that the Goths on the side of the Romans were Visigoths, while Theodoric's father and his people fought on Attila's side. Cassiodorus must have known this, because his grandfather had been one of those who went to plead with the Huns to spare Rome. For Cassiodorus, however, practical political aims dwarfed family legend.

In his reference to the reign of Odoacer, Cassiodorus confined himself to listing the consuls (save for two brief remarks), while his eloquence became nothing short of consummate when he depicted the events that followed Theodoric's enthronement. He mentioned the Ostrogothic king's visit to Rome in A. D. 500, and extolled his building plans, and so on.

The *Chronica* ended with a portrayal of the events related to Eutharic — his marrying Theodoric's daughter Amalasuntha, his consulship, and the harmony that ostensibly reigned in the kingdom. This posture of the writer of the *Chronica* was unquestionably the posture of a court panegyrist, while the tenor of the chronicle as such, seemingly constructed in a largely traditional Roman spirit, was really deeply pro-Gothic.

This was approximately the time when Cassiodorus, prompted by Theodoric, set about writing a treatise that would make the history of the Goths a Roman history.<sup>7</sup> He described the origins and accomplishments of the

Goths in twelve books, which, entitled *History of the Goths*, were lost in the early Middle Ages. But we can obtain some idea of them, because a condensed version was produced by Jordanes, himself a Goth or possibly an Alan, in 551. Jordanes' students note the influence on his writings of Livy, Tacitus, Fannius Strabo, Flavius Josephus (of whom Cassiodorus had been especially fond), and Dio Cassius. This predilection, however, is probably to be traced to Cassiodorus' *History of the Goths*.

The latter's main idea, which Jordanes also nursed in his condensation, was to glorify the gens of the Amalings and the barbarian governmental system. As any other history of the barbarian peoples of the early Middle Ages, that of the Goths by Cassiodorus-Jordanes helped assert the self-identity of the peoples that were just stepping into the European arena of history. Another significant point: Cassiodorus' *History* was the first history of a barbarian people written by a Roman. (For, after all, Tacitus' *Germania* was not a history in the generic sense of the word.) It had been produced specially to acknowledge the historical significance of the barbarian world for the human destiny even in the eyes of a Roman. It also indicated that through their assimilation of the Roman tradition, barbarian rulers had come to appreciate that the word, the book, was an important element of politics.

The Gothic undercurrent of Theodoric's "pro-Roman" policy was ultimately apprehended by part of the Roman senatorial aristocracy headed by Symmachus and Boethius. Cassiodorus, however, did not join their camp and remained faithful to the barbarian ruler.

It would be wrong, however, to consider the pro-Gothic gravitation of Cassiodorus' historical writings merely a reflection of his political orientation. He had fore-runners among the Christian Roman historians, namely Paulus Orosius and Salvianus, both of them conspicuous among the 5th-century scholars. Orosius' universal history, *Historia Adversus Paganos*, forcefully depicted the disaster that had befallen the Roman world, on the one hand, and spilled over with really groundless optimism, on the other, in the hope that despite the cataclysms and

the barbarian conquests, Rome would stand eternal. Let us not go into the motivations of Orosius, that brilliant pupil of Augustine. The thing to note is that his writings represented a new posture in relation to the barbarians, whom Roman historians had previously ignored. Orosius maintained that there had been another side to the Roman victories, namely, that they had been defeats and disasters for other peoples. He wrote with sympathy for the fight put up against Rome by other peoples, and portrayed the positive features of the barbarians. Though, it is true, this was not the determinative element in Orosius' writings, it was evidence of visible changes in the Roman outlook and mentality.

Historian Salvianus, author of *De Gubernatione Dei*, was still more explicit. He wrote in so many words that the empire was dead or would soon die. He held that Providence had rightly punished the Romans. They had received their deserts for their many crimes, while the barbarians were probably more virtuous and therefore deserved to win.

But while Orosius and Salvianus had written history and also philosophised over it, searching for its higher purpose, Cassiodorus had deliberately confined himself to compiling a chronology and listing the facts, or whatever he passed off as the facts. He wanted to remain a Roman, but he also wanted to be a Christian historian and, what is more, a faithful and well-meaning subject of the Ostrogothic king, perhaps even more, the king's ideologist. And there is no denying that Cassiodorus employed the most convenient form of historical treatise for this purpose, because philosophy, much less philosophy of history, had never been his field. He had been mainly a politician, and wrote history only inasmuch as he had been just that, a politician. His *History of the Goths* was an enormous contribution to the political self-identification of the Goths.

His *Variae*, a collection of the decrees, rescripts and memorials of Theodoric and his successors, the regulations of government offices, and so on, covering the period from A.D. 507 to 537, served the same purposes. Nearly everything in this compendium, quite unprecedented in the

Middle Ages, had been written by Cassiodorus himself, while he was quaestor, and then magister officiorum and prefect, of the royal court. As their author, and now compiler, he had, indeed, most consistently and diligently, invoking all his eloquence and elegance of style, sought to impart a share of Roman dignity to the kings of the Ostrogoths.

For the richness of its content, *Variae* was probably an encyclopaedia of the social affairs of its time. It contained extensive information about the social, political and cultural life of the Ostrogothic society and state, and also about its agriculture, crafts, commerce, and military organisation. There are vivid descriptions of popular unrest and no less vivid descriptions of popular customs and natural phenomena. Some of the portraits of Cassiodorus' contemporaries are nothing short of masterly. *Variae* was published in A.D. 537-538, when the kingdom of the Ostrogoths and the Byzantine Empire were bitterly at war, and was imbued with the peacemaking idea. Cassiodorus, who was convinced that disputes should be settled by negotiation rather than arms,<sup>8</sup> exclaimed: "Man was not given a tongue that he should resort to arms!"<sup>9</sup>

*Variae* was not merely a political, but also a brilliant literary, monument of its times. In fact, that was exactly how it was conceived by Cassiodorus. He said as much in the introduction. He had laboured for the benefit of learned men, he wrote, so that posterity should be apprised of the hardships of his administration, which he had undertaken for the good of society; and he added that posterity would do well to appreciate his incorruptible and conscientious efforts.<sup>10</sup> He wrote that he had abided by the rules of rhetoric, that he had spoken and written with the sole aim of prevailing on people to do what he had mapped out for them to do.

*Variae*, which was produced in the imperial Roman administrative tradition, had itself served as a model for official secular and ecclesiastic documents in the Middle Ages. In medieval diplomacy we come across the same division of memorials into distinct parts: protocol, substance, and ending. The author of *Variae* had deliberately,

I think, left just the substance, the body of the text, for the scribes to copy, so that the collection should be less concrete. This was evidently meant to emphasise that the cited documents were outside time, that they were models for emulation.

But though not conceived as a historical treatise, *Variae* was nonetheless structured on a chronological principle by subjects. The compiler wanted to produce a definitely slanted historical portrayal of his society, touching on all its sides and giving his own appraisals. In that sense, *Variae* may be considered an original type of history. Here Cassiodorus had outstripped his times by many centuries.

What had he accomplished? He had synthesised Roman historical tradition. He had synthesised the Christian practice which had always gravitated towards using documents. He had synthesised the Roman rule of law and rules of administration. This compound gave us a picture of Cassiodorus' world not from outside, but from the inside, as it were, for that world spoke for and of itself. Thereby Cassiodorus carried into effect a principle he had himself proclaimed earlier — that the times were indissolubly connected. In any case, he left for posterity a priceless depiction of his times.

*Variae* was published in Basel by John Siccard in the 16th century, and in Paris by Sebastian Nivellius with notes by Fornerius in 1579 (with four more printings later). It was also put out in Geneva in 1650 and 1659, and again in 1679 by I. Garetius. Then it appeared again, showing that the interest in it was still widespread during the Renaissance and the early modern period.

Years later, Cassiodorus would again pick up the threads of history. But his *Historia tripartita* will have no resemblance to either the *History of the Goths* or *Variae*. It will be a compilation of the works of Sozomen, author of an ecclesiastical history, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Socrates Scholasticus, a Greek church historian, all of them active in the early half of the 5th century. Their works abounded in information about the religious and church struggles whereby Christianity asserted itself as the dominant religion.

Cassiodorus was known to have drawn up his history in three parts jointly with his friend Epiphanius, who knew Greek. Still, the introduction, which was indisputably written by Cassiodorus himself, showed that his contribution as editor had been considerable.

He was as painstaking as usual. He noted that three historians did not always describe the same events in the same way. Which meant that their versions should be collated. And though he did not do so himself, he thereby introduced the idea of "comparative study" as a principle that should unfailingly govern the writing of history.

In the Latinic West, the *Historia tripartita* had been throughout the Middle Ages one of the main sources on church history and the dogmatic struggles during the emergence of Christianity as a dominant religion. There are more than a hundred transcribed copies of it, dating to the 9th century and later. In just the last thirty years of the 15th century it was printed four times, in Augsburg, Cologne, Paris, and Strasbourg.

If things had gone right with Cassiodorus and he had retained the top offices of state, we would probably have known him as just another brilliant Latin stylist. But matters took a different turn. In the 540s it was obvious that the days of the Ostrogothic kingdom were numbered. The Byzantine offensive gained momentum inexorably. Cassiodorus, who had been in power under the Gothic kings but had not impaired his personal relations with the Byzantine court, gradually withdrew into retirement (in effect, this occurred painlessly, though he had to abandon his political plans). But his vigorous and dynamic nature would not let him rest. He discovered an enormous field of activity, that of culture and spiritual affairs. Years later, when 75, he would recall this turning point in his life:

"Together with the beatific Pope Agapetus, having collected and paid the cost of learned teachers, I tried to found a Christian school in Rome on the model of the one that existed for a long time in Alexandria and now exists in the Syrian city of Nasibia, in which the soul could strive for eternal salvation and the tongue acquire impeccable and virtuous eloquence."<sup>11</sup>

Possibly, Cassiodorus and Agapetus meant to organise the school at the Pope's rich library. But the troubled time that befell the Ostrogothic kingdom, the mounting conflict between Italy and Byzantium, which led to a war between them, interfered with this plan. In 536, Pope Agapetus died (at the time Cassiodorus was praetorian prefect in Ravenna), and the idea of founding the first university in the West, fell through.

Upon completing the publication of *Variae* in 538, Cassiodorus wrote a brief composition, *De Anima*. Here was how he described the reasons for writing it:

"When I could finally rejoice over the desired completion of my labours, and, cast out of the ocean of twelve books, I found myself in a placid harbour where, though not all praised me, I did acquire freedom, my friends lost no time to drive me out into a sea of cogitation, requiring me to place the thoughts of the essence of the soul and its excellent qualities, drawn by me from holy and secular books, within people's reach, because the soul was designed to be the key to other great secrets of existence."<sup>12</sup>

Cassiodorus took pains to sum up everything that Augustine, Candianus Mamertus, and other Christian writers, had said about the soul. He set out to prove that the soul was an incorporeal and immortal substance associated with the world of immutable intelligible substances, though, owing to its having been created, it was not identical with them.

Medieval commentators had used Cassiodorus' wholly scholastic constructions as a point of departure in their disputes over the nature of the soul. But his compilation, I think, had no independent significance for the subsequent development of medieval thought. To us now it is important as a reflection of Cassiodorus' own development. *De Anima* is a kind of frontier marking Cassiodorus' renunciation of political activity and the associated literary exercises, and his espousal of the mission of enlightener, which consisted in preserving the intellectual achievements of Antiquity and incorporating them in the burgeoning Christian culture.

In part of the 540s and the 550s, the ex-magister officiorum of the Ostrogothic kingdom lived in Constantinople in the capacity of a well-to-do but obscure foreigner. His contacts with people were restricted because he had never properly mastered Greek.

Then he struck upon the idea of producing a theoretical substantiation of the Christian intellectual culture. This, he felt, would meet the needs of a world lapsing into barbarism. Typically, he never complained, as many of his contemporaries did, about any decline of culture.

Always sober-minded and realistic, as all his subsequent activity showed, Cassiodorus set out to initiate new approaches to the educational system and to the system of preserving and passing down cultural values. This was to help buttress the position of the church and Christianity in the European world, most of which was settled by peoples who had practically no idea of the spiritual accomplishments of the antique world and were only vaguely cognisant of the complicated theological disputes.

Cassiodorus was no trailblazer in formulating the fundamental principles of the Christian culture. He merely followed in the footsteps of several generations of fathers of the church, carrying on the line of Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, and Augustine. But in a certain sense, he doubtless was a trailblazer in carrying these ideas into practice.

Somewhere around A.D. 540, Cassiodorus set out to write commentaries to the psalms. In tackling this job, he observed: "Once upon a time, when I was still in Ravenna, I had tried to appease the anxieties that were related to the fulfilment of my duties of state and the corrosive bitterness of my secular cares, by the sweetness of the heavenly Psalter."<sup>13</sup>

It the trying years of banishment, Cassiodorus probably hoped that writing a commentary on the Psalter would distract him. For someone who had for several dozen years been in the thick of the affairs of state it must indeed have been difficult to readapt. But the main reason for wanting to write that exhaustive commentary, as Cas-



siodorus pointed out himself, was the lack of clarity in understanding the psalms and the wish to make sure of who wrote them, and to elucidate their meaning.

Cassiodorus, as he said himself, was eager to produce a key to the psalms on the basis of a similar composition by the "most eloquent" Augustine. He held that his own commentary would largely repeat the writings of that "most excellent of tutors". In fact, however, Cassiodorus' commentary was in no way a copy of Augustine's. He most forcefully displayed independent thinking.

The Book of Psalms, one of the books of the Old Testament, was composed of 150 songs, hymns, and prayers in praise of God. The bulk was traced to the biblical King David, and some to King Solomon. The psalms are an important element of any, even the briefest, devotional service. The Psalter was also used in many emergency situations: illnesses, deaths, exorcisms, and the like. It was also favourite reading among Christians in their free time. People learned to read by it. Young people knew it by heart. Any man acquainted with the Psalter was considered educated.

Cassiodorus had set out to comment on the psalms above all for didactic purposes. The 18 chapters of preliminary explanatory remarks (on how to use the commentary), made this quite clear. Here Cassiodorus explained the principles for classifying the psalms on the basis of their specific subject matter, setting the exegeses, based on content, on a specific course.

The commentaries to the psalms contain few quotations or direct borrowings from Augustine. Clearly, Cassiodorus was well grounded in theology. He made use, among others, of the writings of Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Prosper of Aquitaine, Cyprian, and Dionysius Exiguus (who was a friend of Cassiodorus' for many years). Cassiodorus also referred to pagan authors such as Virgil, Cicero, and Macrobius, and cited Eastern theologians such as Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom.

The preliminary chapters of the commentary were of interest, too, as Cassiodorus' first attempt at establishing

the link between the liberal arts, human knowledge, and the divine Revelation. The idea was not novel in Christian literature. Clement of Alexandria had shown a keen interest in the matter long before Cassiodorus. And, mind you, his approach was one of reconciliation, noting that science and the arts were designed to train the soul in contemplating objects that were within the reach of the mind. Augustine, on the other hand, referred to the Bible as a source not only of divine but also secular knowledge, notably rhetoric.

Cassiodorus elaborated on this thought. He set out to produce a theory of linkage between divine and secular knowledge. Later, he elaborated upon this in his *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularum Litterarum*.

In the Middle Ages, we may recall, Cassiodorus' commentaries on the Psalter were the most widespread of his works. To begin with, they dealt with a most popular subject. But I think the theoretical disquisitions and the exegetical technique used in them were also responsible for their popularity.

Cassiodorus took a close look at the character of the link between divine verity, which he identified with "divine eloquence", and the Holy Scriptures. He wrote: "First of all, we must admit that God's omnipotence has so enormously enriched his eloquence in dealing with the many arts and sciences, that it shines with the same astonishing brilliance for those who associate with it directly and those who are at pains to work the irrigated fields of other sciences."<sup>14</sup>

The Bible, whose voice is heard everywhere by everybody (as Cassiodorus put it), was the source of secular knowledge, for It contained within Itself all its beginnings. "The divine foundation of the Holy Scriptures and human speech is one and the same," he wrote, "so that all creatures should apprehend it without difficulty."<sup>15</sup>

The rhetorical fundamentals of theology and secular education were the same. Cassiodorus amplified: "It is quite obvious that people with secular knowledge have a lot later transferred what originated in divine books into the collections of proofs that the Greeks called topic and

into the arts of dialectics and rhetoric.”<sup>16</sup>

In short, with the church's intellectual dominance increasing, secular knowledge was vindicated because, according to Cassiodorus, it was of doubtlessly divine origin. More, he did not stop at legalising secular knowledge. He underscored its importance as a means of apprehending the Scriptures. “Feeling covers the truth with a veil of secrecy, and to attain its life-giving meaning calls for most diligent study,” he wrote.<sup>17</sup>

A person could reach the eternal truth through transient, temporal substances marked by the celestial spirit. That was why apprehending divine principles called for “the utmost diligence”, for they became understandable through study of all the particles of the world in which the divine law resided.

These ideas show that Cassiodorus acknowledged the divine nature of the world, and the presence of the divine essence in all things, which predicated its unity (this, it seems to me, is an echo of the Neoplatonist pantheism).

For Cassiodorus the world was not only knowable as concerns its more general objective laws and, indeed, its more concrete sensory emanations, but also most interesting. All this convinced him that cognitive activity should be more vigorous both in building logical abstractions and in amassing concrete knowledge.

And Cassiodorus carried his theoretical principles into practice. He offered models of how to interpret psalms, and also a model of exegetic techniques. A most concerned tutor, he suggested to his readers a detailed plan of constructing commentaries, and thereupon followed it faithfully himself. The commentaries on each psalm consist of an introductory discussion of its title, a brief attribution to its author (Cassiodorus called him cantor), a division of the psalm (*divisio psalmi*) showing its structure, and the order in which its content is presented. Then follows a commentary on each verse, and a conclusion summing up the more important points of the interpretation and elucidation of the symbolic meanings and the allegorical sense. This exegetic technique was later borrowed by medieval commentators and scholiasts.

It is of interest to look into the content of Cassiodorus' interpretations. His exegesis is rounded out by a variety of concrete information concerning the liberal arts—rhetoric and dialectics, and also arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Cassiodorus discussed the derivation and history of words and notions, the nature of quantity and magnitude, the motion of heavenly bodies, the difference between day and night, the nature of earthly things, and so on. He regarded this specific information highly important because, as he put it, "frequently a single syllable reveals the inexpressible nature of the Supreme Essence".

Given this approach, the commentaries on the Psalter served as a source of secular as well as theological knowledge. I can only add that Cassiodorus' exegetic techniques reposed on the logic of words. This helped develop a disciplined mind ideally adapted to interpreting, examining, and dismembering the structure of the logical construction, and correlating its parts to each other, while hardly able to produce an original synthesis or to break new ground.

In the mid-550s Cassiodorus returned to his native Bruttium in what is present-day Calabria. Here in Scylla, on his estate, Vivarium, he founded a monastic institution that was fated to play an important part in the making of the European medieval culture.

Religious communities modelled on ascetic principles were known to have existed long before Christianity. (Take the Pythagorean and Orphic fraternities, and the communities of priests in the Memphic temple, etc.) The initiator of Christian hermitry was St. Antony, who withdrew from the world to the desert. Cassiodorus described him as the father of monasticism and paid him especially reverent homage. The first monastic rules were worked out by Pachomius, who founded the first Christian coenobitic institution at Tabennae (Tabennisi), an island on the Nile near Tentyra (now Dendera). Thereupon monasticism became widespread in the East. In due course, Basil of Caesarea improved and elaborated on the Rule of Pachomius. The Rule of Basil has, indeed, left a profound

imprint on the religious life of the Christian East, and remains to this day the one code of Orthodox monasticism.

In the West, monasticism appeared later than it did in the East. Monasteries were known to have existed in the 4th century in Cisalpine Gaul, Northern Africa, and Spain. But Benedict of Nursia, active in the early 6th century, is considered the true founder of Western monasticism. In 529 he established a monastery in Monte Cassino, which became the model for monastic institutions in Western Europe. He wrote his Rule (the *Regula magistri*), which envisaged that members of any monastic community were united in the framework of obedience to the abbot or other superior. The Rule of Benedict became the West's basic monastic code in the early Middle Ages.

Cassiodorus' monastery, which was most probably governed by the Rule of Basil, was distinctly different from other, both earlier and contemporary, monastic institutions. The latter's purpose was to serve God by abstinence, fighting the evil spirit, and prayer. All in all, it amounted to the monks' radical renunciation of life.

Benedict's Rule introduced new elements in asceticism and monasticism. He set priority on the monks' duty to engage in physical labour. Labour, notably working the soil, was considered by the Benedictines no less of a virtue and form of serving God as the choral office, prayer, study, and abstention.

The monastery of Cassiodorus was also founded on work, but spiritual work rather than physical. Nor was there any trace of asceticism there. It took its name, Vivarium, from its many fish ponds. With his usual expressive gusto, Cassiodorus depicted it in the following terms:

"And so the locality where stands the Vivarium monastery beckons you, for everything must be prepared there for the reception of travellers and of the needy; you have there in the neighbourhood amply watered orchards and the waters on the Pelena rich in fish; it is neither turbulent nor is it over-shallow; it flows, moderated artfully as needed for irrigating your orchards and for the working of flour mills; it offers water when necessary, and when your need is satisfied it retreats once more... The sea, too, is so

close that fish may be obtained in different ways; and if you so wish you may release the caught fish in the vivaria, for with God's help I have arranged for ponds where a multitude of fish lives in dependable captivity... I have also had baths constructed there, which are good for bodily pains; water flows into them from translucent streams, pleasant to drink and to wash in."<sup>18</sup>

Cassiodorus hoped that people from all over ravaged and ruined Italy would come to his abode. He hoped that in Vivarium many of them would acquire an education, and those eager to serve God would be able to lead the life of anchorites, for "there are remote desert-like places surrounded and securely locked by ancient stone walls". The abbot held up the shining example of blending extensive knowledge with a life of purity and virtue.

The former king's chancellor, who was a good judge of men, naturally did not rule out the fact that learning would be beyond the powers of some of the monastery's inmates. But as a true teacher, he insisted that even the most unfit should be diligent and should try to acquaint themselves with at least the enumeration of what the secular sciences, above all the "liberal arts", dealt with. Cassiodorus saw the main goal in cultivating "love of reading and a sincere desire to apprehend the truth".<sup>19</sup> Then, he observed, and rightly, "salutary diligence will impart knowledge even to those who were at first frightened by the profundity of the books they read".<sup>20</sup> Nor could Cassiodorus fail to note in this context, as a Christian was wont, that "God provides consummate wisdom to anyone he wishes",<sup>21</sup> but he added that it was still better for the person to seek knowledge on his own, for knowledge was never superfluous.

As a man of action, Cassiodorus did not confine himself to the holy sciences and liberal arts. In his practices in Vivarium he included what would best be described as the science of living: aiding people in most diverse situations. And here Cassiodorus went farther than the merely edifying injunctions widespread among Christian ecclesiastics. He was aware that a human being must first of all have shelter, a roof over his head. That was Vivarium's prime

purpose. It was a shelter for the suffering and for those needing consolation. Then a man had to be fed, for which it "is essential to have orchards, to work the fields, and enjoy the plentitude of earthly crops". Cassiodorus elaborated: "The work of your hands should feed not only the inmates of Vivarium, but also the travellers, the sick, and the poor who happen to come to the monastery or who live nearby... It would be wrong to miss any single occasion to help people wherever possible."<sup>22</sup>

His was a most humane programme, and doubly so if we recall the grimness of the conditions that prevailed in the country in those days.

To do things well it was essential to engage in farming. But it was also important to study the agricultural writings of such Roman authorities as Columella and Palladius. Nor was it enough to care for just a man's spirit. He had to be treated against bodily illnesses. That is why Cassiodorus organised study of medicine. No few works of a medical nature were stored in the monastery's library.

If it was impossible to read the Greeks, Cassiodorus noted, it would still be a good idea to acquaint oneself with Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*, the five books of which contained descriptions of over 600 medicinal plants. (Dioscorides, I might add, was widely known in the Byzantine Empire. The best known script is the illustrated plant code of Julian Anicetus of A. D. 512, kept at the National Library of Austria.) As a rule, Dioscorides' scripts contained a collection of drawings.

Cassiodorus also recommended reading the Latin translation of Hippocrates and the *Therapeutica* of Galen, a physician who, though born in Asia Minor, lived and practised medicine in Rome, and also the *Medicina* of Aurelius Silius and a collection of anonymous medical treatises. All these works, Cassiodorus observed, were "available in our library".<sup>23</sup>

As we see, he constructed a dependable scholarly foundation for practical medicine. This was of the utmost importance for the ongoing and future development of the medieval culture.

But apart from the vigorous and diverse activity of its inmates, the main thing was that Vivarium became a most important educational centre, a repository of spiritual traditions and knowledge. For here was shaped the three-pronged structure of the monastery as a cultural centre which prevailed throughout the Middle Ages — the three prongs being a library, a scriptorium, and a school.

The library was the immediate repository of scrolls and scripts. The scriptorium was the workshop where manuscripts were written or copied, and where scripts were disseminated, for they were produced not only for internal use but also for sale. Scripts made in Vivarium were in fact widespread in all Western Europe. (Some are available in Leningrad's Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library.) And the school was an institution for instruction, for imparting knowledge, for training those who would be its bearers.

The Vivarium library contained a wealth of divine and secular written knowledge. (A list of the authors who were ostensibly available is given in Minor's edition of Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*.) But it is the type of books rather than their number that impresses us most, though numbers, too, speak of Cassiodorus' most serious attitude towards education. Certainly, Christian literature was amply represented, including various scripts of the Bible and works of Christian authors, notably the top authorities of the Western church. In his *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus took special pains to describe the works of Hilary of Poitiers, Cyprian, Ambrose of Mediolan, Jerome, and, last but not least, his favourite author, St. Augustine. The father superior of the Vivarium monastery referred with praise to the works of people who laboured at his side. He declared, for example, that the book of his friend Eugippius was worth a whole library.<sup>24</sup> He admired Dionysius, a scholar of Scythian origin, who for his gifts and ways was "a true Roman" and whom he, Cassiodorus, had once taught dialectics. This monk, who had a command of Greek and Latin and had translated many useful books



from Greek, delighted the writer of the *Institutiones* with his subtle interpretations of various texts.

The codices of Christian historians were lovingly kept in the Vivarium library, among whom Cassiodorus singled out Flavius Josephus who was not, in effect, a Christian writer but who had written about Christ. Cassiodorus did not hesitate to describe Josephus as "the second Livy", making special mention of his *Antiquities of the Jews* in 20 books.<sup>25</sup> He went on to recommend the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote the biography of Emperor Constantine I (called the Great), Tyrannius Rufinus, who translated Eusebius' *History* into Latin and added two books to it, Socrates Scholasticus, Hermius Sozomen, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, the three popular Greek writers of church histories that served as the fabric for Cassiodorus' *Historia Tripartita*—Marcellinus Illiricus, Genadius of Massilia, Paulus Orosius, and various chronicles covering events from Adam to practically his own times.

Cassiodorus also wanted the inmates of his monastic institution to read the lives of distinguished and eminent men, and notably the pertinent works of Jerome.

But the Christian literature that was kept, transcribed or read in Vivarium was of a far wider range. Analysis of Cassiodorus' own writings shows that it covered nearly all the apologetics, the patristic and hagiographic literature in Latin, and also the key works of Greek Byzantine authors.

But Christian literature was only a fragment of Vivarium's written treasures. A considerable part of the library consisted of the works of the great pagans. It had a selection of philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Porphyry, Marius Victorinus and Boethius, the scientists and physicians Theophrastus, Hippocrates, Galen, and others, mathematicians from Pythagoras to Euclid and Nicomachus, Latin and Greek grammarians, including Aelius Donatus and Priscian, such authorities on rhetoric and the art of teaching as Quintilian and Cicero, theorists of music Alypius, Gaudentius, and Apuleius of Madauros, the astronomer Ptolemy, and others, the scholars Varro and Pliny the Elder, the historians Titus Livy, Sallustius

Crispus, and Suetonius, the poets Virgil, Horace, and Catullus, the satirist Juvenal, and many many other pagan authors whom Cassiodorus commended highly and considered obligatory reading.

The father superior set an example of diligence, reading and study. His writings are, indeed, evidence of his extensive knowledge. More, he offered résumés of what he thought most important out of the antique knowledge in two books of his own *Institutiones*. He listed intellectual work as an obligatory and worthy element of the burgeoning (medieval) culture, in which the scholarly cleric would be the most conspicuous figure.

Cassiodorus' committed treatment of the cultural heritage was also seen in that he became a zealous promoter of transcribing and disseminating books. The codices produced in Vivarium were of high quality and good finish. When transcribing, Cassiodorus advised the scribes, think not only of how to write, but also of what you are writing. He called on them to verify and compare the texts they were transcribing with other manuscripts. This means that philological research was conducted at the monastery. It is no accident, to be sure, that Vivarium is sometimes called a "research community".

Cassiodorus lavished high praise on the scribes, librarians, and keepers of manuscripts — on all those, in fact, who in later years formed the core of the medieval intelligentsia, a group of nameless but indispensable disseminators of culture. "It is a praiseworthy and happy intention," Cassiodorus wrote, "to dedicate oneself to preaching and to conveying the truth with the aid of one's fingers, soundlessly resurrecting those who were consigned to oblivion, and fighting evil with quill and ink."<sup>26</sup>

At 92, Cassiodorus wrote a piece entitled *De Orthographia*. Here he spelled out the basics every scribe was to follow. It was in a way Cassiodorus' intellectual testament. He insisted that culture should not be elitist, that it should be widespread.

He wrote that transcribing required extensive knowledge, great skill, and scrupulous diligence. He therefore called on all scribes to learn from the ancient orthograph-

ers Vellius Longus, Curtius Valerian, Papirianus, Adamantius the Martyr, and others. The librarian and keeper should be sure to register and describe all books. The scribe was obliged to write in a good hand, and without mistakes. A book combined scholarship and artistry. The shape, lettering and illuminations should befit the book's content. Cassiodorus had abided by these rules all his life himself, and wanted others to do so as well.

The art of writing words was for Cassiodorus of a special, near holy, importance. A scribe's fundamental duty was to be an impeccable speller and grammarian, and to have the requisite knowledge. Because he was not a mere scribbler, but in a certain sense also a creator of books who had no right to distort what the author had put into his creation. The scribe's duty was to help present more vividly the book's true meaning. A book should be transcribed without mistakes and attractively (as regards the lettering and spacing and arrangement of words). Falling back on authorities in the matter, Cassiodorus let us know at length and with the utmost precision how each letter should be put down, how to join or separate syllables, how to abbreviate, and, finally, in what manner and mood to approach each type of script.

He made his explications with affection and care, as someone who had laboured hard and long all his life, striving for more knowledge and professional skill, someone who had always censured indolence and appreciated commitment and dedication to one's obligations, and specifically one's dedication to work as the principal obligation. It appears, indeed, that, having held high office, having enjoyed honours and wealth, having experienced the gaudy vanities of life at the royal court, Cassiodorus set out at the end of his days to hand down his scientific knowledge, but also the meaning and sense of life as he had imbibed it, as a fine blend of spirituality and hard work. That, he was convinced, was the only way to attain harmony within oneself and thereby live a long and meaningful life.

Vivarium, which, though based on Christian tradition, had also borrowed many elements of organisation from

the pagan intellectual communities, influenced the further development of monasticism, and specifically the Benedictine monastic institutions, which became repositories of book knowledge and scholastic education, and where the transcription of books was gradually elevated to a fine art. It was only natural, therefore, that the oldest scripts of Cassiodorus' own works were discovered in the libraries of the Benedictine abbeys in Corbie, Reichenau, and elsewhere.

A conspicuous aspect in Vivarium's organisation was that Cassiodorus enlisted not only educated people, but also those who could neither read nor write. It was for the latter that he wrote his *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularum Litterarum*. But the weight of his treatise proved to be far greater. It became the cornerstone of the medieval educational system.

Cassiodorus wrote *Institutiones* when he was past 75. It consisted of two relatively self-sustained books—a book of instruction in divine literature (*Institutiones Divinarum Litterarum*), and a book of instruction in the liberal arts (*De Artibus ac Disciplinis liberalium litterarum*). And it was the latter of these that had a greater resonance in most studies of the history of literature, philosophy, and education (probably because of its worldly title). It is usually referred to as a model of how to conserve antique knowledge. And this despite the fact that Cassiodorus was repeatedly berated for over-simplifying. But to me it seems that such censure of the labours of Vivarium's father superior was itself a bit simplistic.

To begin with, the second book of *Institutiones* should never be dissociated from the first. They comprise an indissoluble entity, and in a way continue the theoretical part of the commentaries on the Psalter. His categorical refusal to divide the divine and secular sciences was fundamental for Cassiodorus. He was at pains to place the liberal arts upon a dependable foundation, that of the Gospel.

In the first book he elaborated on his concept of Christian knowledge, on the new intellectual culture. Mostly bibliographic in nature, it introduced beginners to the

course of Christian knowledge proper. Cassiodorus spoke of the benefits of combining care for the salvation of one's soul with a secular education. At the same time, he asserted the primacy of the Revelation and the secondary nature of the arts and sciences. Elucidating the content of the second book, which dealt with the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, he wrote: "We shall try with the help of knowledge to understand more deeply whatever takes its beginnings in the Scriptures."<sup>27</sup>

The sources of human wisdom, he maintained, were in the divine Revelation, and teachers had only later put them into their own writings, turning them into guiding principles. This he had already said in his commentaries on the Psalter. He was quite sure that the Gospel covered the Supreme Wisdom, the Divine Truth. He introduced his readers to the course of the divinities, to divine literature, the Bible above all, with thoroughness and care. His textbook was for students who were only embarking on their studies and were not yet able to cope with the intricate interpretations of the church fathers, but were obliged to receive instruction in the fundamental exegetic principles.

Vivarium had a number of different scripts of the Bible, including the Vulgate. Traces of this are to be found in the codices that followed Cassiodorus' manuscripts. In the first book of *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus remained faithful to the patristic tradition and elucidated parts of the Bible book after book. Then came a few chapters of information about the most important ecumenical councils, about the interpretations of various aspects of the Scriptures, notably by Jerome and Augustine, and about the distinctions between the old translations of the Bible and the Septuagint. The 14th chapter of the first book is of interest, because it mentions the scripts of the Bible available in Vivarium.

Then there was a perfectly natural transition to how holy books should be correctly copied. The next chapter was entitled, *De Vera Scriptura Sacra*, which summarised some of the earlier points and some of the points made by Augustine in his *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Information about the Christian historians Cassiodorus set forth in a special chapter. This may be traced to his own past activity as historian and author of *Chronica*, *Historia Gothorum*, and *Historia Tripartita*. He referred to historians with reverence, describing them as people who "connect the times" and were "chroniclers of the age".

Then came chapters dealing with theologians who had earned Cassiodorus' greatest respect, namely, Hilary of Poitiers, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and his own contemporaries Eugippius and Dionysius Exiguus.

A short chapter in which Cassiodorus exhorted his monks to make study of the Scriptures the centre and purpose of their intellectual lives, was followed by sections that dealt with what were mostly non-religious subjects. They contained diverse information on cosmography (based on Ptolemy), agriculture (based on the works of Gargilius Martial and Lucius Columella), spelling, medicine, and so on. This leads to the obvious conclusion that the author considered it essential for everyone to gain a command of certain practical knowledge and acquire practical skills.

The last few chapters of the first book lead the student directly to the study of the liberal arts and, I honestly feel, excel the second book for their richness and character of presentation. They show that the concrete knowledge of the ancients was intact, and that it could not fail to find uses in everyday lives of the people of those times.

Cassiodorus would not have been himself if he had not tried to find a compromise and provide theoretical substance for the importance of the liberal arts in the framework of the Christian culture. He went back to this subject, which seems to have obsessed him, and said, "he who is ignorant of letters cannot gain true wisdom".<sup>28</sup> Study and accumulation of knowledge was the same means of knowing and serving God as a virtuous life. This was no generally accepted view in Cassiodorus' day. He wrote: "In the Holy Scripture, as in the writings of the most scholarly commentators, we can understand many things with the aid of rhetorical figures, the art of rhetoric, and many things with the aid of dialectics and such disciplines

as arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. The instruction of secular teachers in the arts and sciences is not useless either."<sup>29</sup>

The content of the seven liberal arts was given in outline. In substance, the book *De Artibus ac Disciplinis liberalium litterarum*, was no more than a summary, a book of notes for the memory. In his explanation of the system of the seven liberal arts and their division, Cassiodorus relied on the Bible (the psalms of David and Solomon, and the Evangel of Matthew). But he made frequent mention, too, of antique writers, namely, Homer, Pythagoras, Democritus, Virgil, Cicero, Gaudentius, and others.

*Institutiones* had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages as a textbook, and a criterion of the sequence and volume of knowledge imparted to students.

Cassiodorus referred to the components of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* as to the arts (*ars*) and sciences (*disciplinae*). He defined the arts as something that "restricts and constrains us by its rules". He held that the arts were subdivided into three types: the essence of the first was observation, cognition, and appraisal. These were theoretical arts, which called for intellectual knowledge. The two other types were practical and were expressed in direct action, such as dance, or based on visual perception, such as painting.

Referring to the authority of Plato and Aristotle, Cassiodorus averred that science was knowledge of the necessary, that is, of the apodictic, while the subject of the arts was accidental and indefinable. In his interpretation, the seven grades of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* might be taken to be sciences in one respect, and arts in another respect, because they reflected existence from different angles and in different ways. Cassiodorus observed, "The beginning of the faculty of speaking is given by Nature, and the beginning of art by observation."<sup>30</sup>

As tradition demanded, Cassiodorus' *trivium* consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics or logic, and the *quadrivium* of the cycle of mathematical sciences—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

This canon had been worked out for the Roman educa-

tional system. It was set forth in detail by Martianus Capella. Boethius, a contemporary of Cassiodorus, too, had devoted himself to giving the *quadrivium* a theoretical grounding and to expounding the sciences that were part of it. And Cassiodorus' book was an obviously poor third when compared to the works of the above two authors, because it was overly schematic, disjointed, and curt, and completely lacking in philosophical discussion.

As in all his other works, Cassiodorus did not aspire to originality in the second book of *Institutiones*. In the spirit of the rising era, he considered fidelity to canon a far greater virtue than creative originality. Grammar was for him the source and foundation of the liberal arts. By grammar he meant information on sounds, letters, syllables, accents, feet, figures of speech, spelling, and the parts of speech.

The second chapter dealt with rhetoric or the art of speaking. Cassiodorus fell back on the classical division of rhetoric into five parts: arrangement (*inventio*), which meant arranging the content of the speeches and the proofs given in them into a system; disposition (*dispositio*), which included the structure of the speech, usually also of five elements (introduction, proposition, presentation, proof or denial, and conclusion); elocution (*elocutio*), which is the art of choosing and combining words, use of language, tropes, and figures of speech; memorisation (*memoria*); and delivery (*pronuntiatio*).

*Institutiones* demonstrated the practical uses of rhetoric in civic life. Rhetoric was subdivided according to its purpose into forensic, political, approbatory, absolute, and so on. Cassiodorus also classified the proofs used in speeches, singling out honorary, exclusive, usual, commonplace, presumptive, dual, and vague.

In the chapter on dialectics, he followed in Aristotle's footsteps and divided philosophy into contemplative and active. Contemplative philosophy, he observed, consisted of natural, innate, doctrinal, and divine philosophy. Doctrinal philosophy comprehended arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Active philosophy, for its part, comprehended ethics or moral philosophy, and economic



and civic philosophy. For Cassiodorus, philosophy was the loftiest of all arts, the science of sciences. Divine and human subsistences were within its reach. It was the intermediary with death, showing people the way to their future abode. Summing up, Cassiodorus declared: "Philosophy is the way open to man to know God."<sup>31</sup> This was most decidedly a Christian interpretation of philosophy, but it flowed clearly from the antique pagan tradition.

Cassiodorus offered a brief summary of Porphyry's *Isagoge* to Aristotle's *Categoriae*. We can only recall how comprehensive, even conclusive, the commentary to this treatise was by Boethius in the early 6th century, from which medieval thought drew the problem of universals. There is not even a hint about the complexity of that problem in Cassiodorus. He merely names the issues raised in Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and goes on to enumerate the ten Aristotelian classes (categories). Upon defining topic as a collection of arguments, a source of emotions, and of the principles of speech, Cassiodorus set forth its basic propositions.

He described mathematics as a science which dealt with abstract quantitative entities. God, he wrote, dispositioned all substances by means of measures and numerals, and that was why it was essential to learn mathematics. When classifying numerals, Cassiodorus followed Boethius, who, for his part, followed the Pythagorean and Platonist tradition. I might add as a sidelight that he defined one of the practical uses of arithmetic as calculating the time of Christian holidays.

He wrote that music imbued all manifestations of being from the beginning of time. Here he referred to Pythagoras, Gaudentius, and the Christian thinkers Mutianus, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine. Following their example, he established a link between music and virtue.

He defined the essence of geometry out of the distinctions that the Creator had imparted to His creation, because geometry was a science of immobile magnitudes and forms. He also established the definition of astronomy or "the law of the stars" upon analogous grounds, singling

out 16 of its positions, with no special description of any of them. To be sure, the brevity of the account in the second book of *Institutiones* is at odds with Cassiodorus' usual eloquence and predilection for verbosity.

The first and second books of *Institutiones*, which comprised one whole, encompassed the entire basic educational curriculum of the medieval man. Sometimes, Cassiodorus is portrayed as something of a humanist, the pioneer of humanitarian studies (*studia humanitatis*). But there hardly are sufficient grounds for this. As a fairly well educated (though inferior in that respect to Boethius, his distinguished contemporary) and realistic person, Cassiodorus elaborated and put to use a new type of education, whose purpose was to serve the Christian church, and to know the Scriptures. This was to blend with knowledge of a modicum of secular sciences. Cassiodorus did not go from the Scriptures to secular knowledge, but from the basics of the Scriptures and the secular sciences to a profound apprehension of the divine law that resided in all existing things. He was, indeed, more interested in the divine than the secular. But he did not confine himself to theorising alone, as most of his predecessors did. He created a model centre of culture in keeping with the realities of his time. His purpose was not mere discussion, but also the establishment of a cultural model of a new type which, as practice showed, could not be built upon ruins alone, and had to absorb certain elements of the preceding antique culture, adapting them to the needs of the times.

Cassiodorus was a new sort of person — neither keeper nor transmitter of the achievements of the ancients. Nor was he the last of the guardians of the antique culture, as he was sometimes described. He was guardian least of all, for he was active, sensible and farsighted as he moulded a new culture, selecting the essential fabric for it out of the preceding achievements.

*Institutiones* and the other works of Cassiodorus written in Vivarium, have one more point to commend them. By analysing them we can judge, if only indirectly, which of the antique authors and Christian writers had been known and accepted in those days and what Cassiodorus

was eager to pass down to posterity. The circle of antique authors was certainly unrestricted: Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Victorinus, Porphyry, Seneca, Varro, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, Virgil, Cicero, Macrobius, Columella, Galen, Gaudentius, Quintilian, Ptolemy, Martianus Capella, Boethius, the Latin grammarians, and the historians Livy and Flavius Josephus, et al. Out of the Christian literature, Cassiodorus relied most of all on the writings of Augustine, for Augustine was to him the highest authority. He also referred to Antony, Tertullian, Ambrose, church fathers and major theologians of East and West, and the historians Eusebius, Orosius, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret.

As father superior of the community in Vivarium, Cassiodorus saw to it that the monks should avoid doctrinal mistakes. Speaking of the transcription of the works of Origen, he pointed out, for example, that the latter was at odds with the church fathers on some points. Therefore, he ruled, his opinions must be treated with care and caution.

It will not be amiss to depict yet another important aspect of the educational activity of Cassiodorus' monastic institution: the translation of books from Greek into Latin. At the end of the 6th century, in fact, Greek authors were out of the reach of people in the West, for knowledge of Greek had waned. Indeed, researchers are sceptical about Cassiodorus himself knowing much Greek. But regardless of whether he did or not, he encouraged the monks to translate into Latin. Translations of Flavius Josephus, whom Cassiodorus described as "nearly a second Livy",<sup>32</sup> had been made in Vivarium. So were the translations of John Chrysostom's *Homilies*. His own *Historia tripartita*, too, was compiled there from Greek sources. Some manuscripts bear the names of the translators—Bellator, Mutianus, and Epiphanius.

In the Vivarium period, Cassiodorus produced other writings as well, mainly of a compilatory nature. These included his commentaries on the Message to the Romans directed against the Pelagian heresy, and commentaries on the writings of Donatus. In the last years of his life,

Cassiodorus wrote commentaries on the Epistles of the Apostles. Here he drew a distinction between two types of literature widespread in his time — the brief (*breves*) and the complexus (*complexiones*) — which medieval authors did not fail to pick up. In his opinion, a brief was a synopsis or an explicative summary, that is, a listing of the content that had to be demonstrated, while the complexus comprehended a full account concerning the same matter.

Following his *De Orthographia*, which I have already discussed, Cassiodorus produced a very short piece, *Computus*, concerning the Christian calendar. It stands apart from the many other similar treatises, because it was the first to use in the West the system of *Anno Domini*, suggested by Dionysius.

Another distinctive feature of Cassiodorus' writings was that they were specifically addressed to the reader. The author did not write for himself. He wanted to be understood, and looked for expressions that made him comprehensible to his readers. The fact that barbarians dominated society was for him a historical reality, the setting for his labours. There was no hint of wisdom for wisdom's sake or art for art's sake in what he wrote. His writings had a distinctly enunciated address and a distinctly enunciated purpose, that of moulding an intelligentsia of a type different from the pagan intelligentsia. This was why he had processed antique knowledge to suit the needs of the new Christian culture.

This explains the longevity of Cassiodorus' writings in the Middle Ages and, more important still, the longevity of his cultural tradition.

Isidore of Seville included part of *Institutiones* and *De Orthographia* in his *Etymologies*. Pope Gregory I mentioned Vivarium. Such outstanding historians of the early Middle Ages as Paul the Deacon and the Venerable Bede, and Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus, those scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance, commended Cassiodorus and set special store by his idea that human wisdom and the liberal arts were of divine origin and agreeable to God. The traditions of Cassiodorus' Vivarium, which had most

probably ceased to exist by the early 7th century (the 9th century according to other sources), flourished in the abbeys of Monte Cassino and Bobbio in Italy. Abbot Giralduus of Monte Cassino devoted part of his writings specially to Cassiodorus. Athanasius the Librarian, a knowledgeable Roman scholar, too, paid homage to Cassiodorus in the 9th century. Nearly a hundred medieval scripts of the *Variae* are extant, as are a large number of manuscripts with the text of the commentaries on the Psalter, which is uncontested evidence of their popularity in the Middle Ages.

Cassiodorus' *Variae* inspired Marsilius of Padua in the 13th century. And many generations of philosophers and theologians, including Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, Albertus Magnus, and John Peckham, addressed themselves to his treatise *De Anima*. During the Renaissance, Cassiodorus was commended as a refined master of Latin style, and many a humanist endeavoured to emulate him.

Though Cassiodorus' influence on the medieval culture was less brilliant than that of Boethius, it was nevertheless stable because his writings and activity were a comprehensive reflection of the spiritual tendencies of his era that lay at the root of the emergent new type of culture. They would realise themselves in feudal Europe's spiritual life at the time of its bloom. Cassiodorus was no original thinker. But he was a splendid organiser. His *Vivarium* was a peculiar paradigm or pattern of medieval culture, imparting to it one of the effective forms of its social being.

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## THE FIRST MEDIEVAL ENCYCLOPAEDIST

Isidore of Seville, one of the most eminent scholars of the 6th and 7th centuries, the first encyclopaedist of the Middle Ages, wrote the following ardent confession of love for his motherland in his *History of the Gothic, Vandal and Suevi Kings*: "Oh, holy Spain, the eternally happy mother of chiefs and peoples, you are more beautiful than any other land from the West right up to the Hindus. Now you are legitimately the queen of all the provinces, your light reaching not only the West, but, indeed, also the East. You are the flower of the world, the most glorious part of it, where the Goths reside in great joy and prosperity!"<sup>1</sup>

Isidore of Seville was born around A.D. 570 in Carthage, an ancient city in Northern Africa. He was one of four children in the family of a noble Hispanic Roman and the daughter of a Visigothic king. Soon after his birth, his parents abandoned Carthage, seized by Byzantine troops, and settled in Spain.

In the then recent past, Spain had been one of the economically and culturally advanced Roman provinces. The Visigoths appeared on the Iberian Peninsula around 415, having shortly before founded the first barbarian state on the territory of the Western Roman Empire with its capital in Toulouse, a large city in Southern Gaul. At the end of the 5th century Clovis I (Chlodwig), the war-

like king of the Franks of the Merovingian dynasty, crushed the Visigoths in battle and took over Bordeaux and Toulouse. The Visigoths withdrew across the Pyrenees, and established their new capital in Toledo.

Isidore's family was typical for the Greco-Roman-Spanish milieu. The larger part of Spain's population were Latin-speaking Hispanic Romans who professed the orthodox Christian faith. Their Visigothic conquerors, on the other hand, came from the barbarian world, and professed Arianism. They were not very numerous, but exercised a strong influence on the country's economic, political, and public life. An intensive Romano-Germanic synthesis was conspicuously under way.

The laws issued in the 6th century were common for Visigoths and Hispano-Romans, and by the 7th century there was a single juridical code. Goths and Hispano-Romans equally shared the burdens of military service. The system of taxation was one and the same for both. Mixed marriages were not frowned upon. In 589, under King Reccared, Catholicism was made the official religion.

Isidore's childhood and youth coincided with the reign of King Leovigild (572-586), who managed to repulse the Franks bearing down from the west, the Byzantines from the south, and the Suevi from the north. Leovigild cut short all separatist tendencies among the Visigothic nobility, and shored up the royal throne in Toledo. He was the first Visigothic king who wore special royal garb and set up a throne in his Toledo palace.

Under the guidance of his elder brother Leander, former archbishop, adviser of Reccared and close friend of Pope Gregory I, Isidore received a first-class classical education in the schools of Seville. That magnificent city on the banks of the Guadalquivir, was known not only for its magnificent palaces, but also for its rich libraries, its well-directed schools, and the refined lifestyle of the local nobility. In that sense, Seville was far more attractive than the austere Toledo, and served as a cultural centre despite the troubled situation (for it was the border city



between the Byzantine and Visigothic zones). Even after it was conquered by the Arabs in 712, the city remained Spain's cultural centre.

After Leander's death around A.D. 600, Isidore became the archbishop of Seville. In those days, the archbishop was not only the spiritual leader and top prelate, but also one of the chief local administrators. Especially so in Spain, where a close interlacement had occurred between the church and the state apparatus. The Toledo (central) and provincial church councils tended to limit the royal power, established the order of succession, defined the rules for the election of kings (who had no hereditary rights), engaged in matters of government and of the treasury, supervised the business of royal gifts, and the pardoning of felons. The 14th Toledo Council, which convened at the end of the 7th century, went so far as to declare "co-government" by king and council.

Isidore had organised and participated in many councils. And his diverse and effective activity here was centred on strengthening Visigothic statehood in Spain. He was an ally of the Visigothic kings, and it was no accident that the politically important issue of combating Eastern heresies, which found many a follower in Spain and resulted in social action that destabilised the centralist aspirations of the Toledo court, was debated in 619 at the council of Seville.

Isidore's political outlook was reflected in his historical writings. He professed pride in the former glory of Spain under Roman rule, but also saw the benefits accruing from the Gothic conquest. For him the Goths were "irreproachable victors", while the other barbarian tribes (the Suevi and the Vandals) who had overrun the Iberian Peninsula before, were coarse and brutal conquerors and heretics. Yet he condemned the revolt against King Leovigild, who was of the Arian faith, by his son Hermenegild, whom his wife, a Frankish princess, had converted to Catholicism. Isidore sided with the heretic king because he was a power that could unite and strengthen the state. Isidore's political motivations, as we see, proved stronger than his religious convictions. He portrayed the history of

the Goths as a succession of victories. He welcomed the peace that came to Spain during the reign of King Reccared, and extolled the tightening of the alliance between the Goths and the Hispano-Romans under Sisebut.

Isidore was in favour of a centralised state, and was therefore always faithful to the royal throne in Toledo. But what endears him to us are his dedicated efforts to consolidate Spanish society ideologically and spiritually. This required that the intellectual achievements of the previous and current eras should be arranged as a system, that the right system of education should be picked, and culture organised to suit the needs of the times.

Isidore was duly acknowledged by his contemporaries. They saw him as a bearer of patriotic feelings, an ideological leader, a profound scholar who not only preserved the knowledge of the ancients, but also brought that knowledge within reach of a broader circle of people. Isidore's works made an immense impact, and not on Spain alone. For many centuries they were the cultural lifeblood of feudal Europe, the source of education and learnedness, and a link between late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Isidore's educational activity proceeded in an intricate historical environment. After Christianity had won and the Western Roman Empire collapsed, and after its territories were settled by barbarian tribes, most antique cultural values were lost. Intellectual affairs in Western Europe were a church monopoly. But the 6th and 7th centuries also witnessed the self-evident emergence of a new feudal society and a concomitant type of culture, which would, indeed, predominate in the next thousand years.

The official church (particularly Pope Gregory I, a contemporary and friend of Leander and Isidore) was occupied constructing a universal Christian civilisation reposing chiefly on the Scriptures and centred on the faith. The idea was, among other things, to convert all barbarians to orthodox Christianity. The more rationalist school, meanwhile, sought to adapt the antique cultural heritage to the needs of the epoch, to reconcile secular knowledge and the Christian tradition, and to educate

the barbarian population. It was bent on consolidating a new type of statehood, and was especially strong in Ostrogothic Italy and Visigothic Spain.

In the late 6th and the 7th century, Isidore was the most distinguished member of this school. Conditions in Visigothic Spain were favourable for his educational aims. Spain was the keeper of the Roman cultural tradition. It was the land of Seneca and Lucan, the eminent philosophers, Quintilian, the famous orator and teacher, Martial, the brilliant epigrammatist and poet, Pomponius Mela, the geographer, Columella, the agriculturalist, and the historian Orosius. The barbarian incursions had not been as destructive here as in the other provinces of the former Roman Empire. Roman schools continued to function, and immense, comprehensive libraries existed (in Seville as well). The Visigothic kings encouraged Spain's cultural advancement. After the Visigoths adopted Catholicism, an attempt to restore the antique cultural heritage was made under the auspices of the state. And Isidore of Seville was its moving spirit, leader, and ideologue. The movement is sometimes referred to as the Visigothic Renaissance.

Isidore was one of the most prolific writers of the early Middle Ages. He wrote a few dozen treatises, and among them *Historia de Regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, *De vita vel Obitu Sanctorum (Patrum)*, and *De Viris Illustribus*, which were histories, and treatises of a "scientific" nature, such as *De Ordine creaturarum* and *De Natura Rerum*, encyclopaedic works entitled *Etymologiae Sive Origines* and *Differentiae*, the didactic *Sententiae*, *Synonymiae*, *Allegoriae Quaedam Sacrae Scripturae*, and *Liber Numerorum*, church and monastic rules, and an extensive correspondence with his contemporaries.

Despite their outward diversity, all of Isidore's writings were, in fact, a response to the need for synthesising the antique heritage and Christian tradition, reworking that heritage and putting it within reach of a world that was being barbarised, systematising the knowledge then known to Europeans, and consolidating Spanish society ideologically and culturally.

Isidore's 20-book *Etymologies*, the first comprehensive encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages, occupied a special place not only in Isidore's own legacy but also in the medieval culture. Indeed, only Vincent of Beauvais' *Great Speculum* could rival it. But *Great Speculum* came later, at the peak of medievalism, and followed a trail that had already been blazed by the scholarly Isidore.

To be sure, Isidore, too, was not the initiator of the encyclopaedic genre. He had eminent and distinguished Roman predecessors: Varro, Verrius Flaccus, Pliny the Elder, Suetonius, Pompeius Festus, and Nonius Marcellus. We must not forget, however, that Roman science, whose follower Isidore was, was not a science in the latter-day European sense. It was knowledge based on direct perception, discourse and imagination, not on experiment or research. This meant that things which we would have qualified as pure fantasy, went into these encyclopaedias. This, however, was not merely due to a childish naivety as some scholars would have us believe, and seems to me entirely logical for a world vision in which far greater significance was attached to the play of the intellect and to general concepts than to observation and verification. The encyclopaedism of the Hellenic era also applied to some of the fundamental works of Roman Antiquity and the Roman educational system, but became more primitive over the ages, forfeiting many of its commendable elements in content and presentation, while spreading to the many textbooks and scholia that became the main teaching aids of those times.

The *Marriage of Philology and Mercury* of Martianus Capella, *Institutione Arithmetica* and *Institutione Musica* of Boethius, and Cassiodorus' *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularum Litterarum*, were also encyclopaedic in their way, but not as all-embracing as Pliny's *Natural History* or the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville. They merely summed up knowledge in a specific field — arithmetic, music, geometry, or astronomy which was, clearly, far more important to do than to elaborate upon it in those last few centuries of Antiquity and the early centuries of medievalism,

in a setting of intensive barbarisation, and a cultural decline. The consolidation of Christianity as the predominant ideology only encouraged this tendency.

The Scriptures provided rigid limits for philosophical knowledge. For a Christian all the answers to the fundamental issues of being were spelled out, and the rock-bottom "first causes" within human reach were no longer a secret. The intellectual universe, like the physical, was strictly limited, and all its main landmarks were given. They extended to the natural and supernatural, creating a specific realness of human existence, human thoughts and sensations.

This single and coordinated world created and administered by God called for similarly generalised, unified and definite knowledge. It was no accident the church fathers did not reject the pagan encyclopaedism. Indeed, fitting it to the Christian dogmata, they made it one of the key methodological principles in the drive to consolidate the new vision of the world. They blended it with the Christian exegesis, and sought to cover thereby all of man's intellectual, ideological, and moral aspirations.

I think it never occurred to Isidore to create his own philosophical system. Nor were the great philosophers of Antiquity or the distinguished philosophical minds of Christianity anywhere close to his ideal. He was devoted to grammar, that "mother of sciences", and to the sparkle of rhetoric. In theology, which became the concentrated expression of the Christian world outlook just as philosophy had been the quintessence of the Greco-Roman, Isidore stood firm on orthodox positions. As a rule, his ideas here were trivial. Though he admired Augustine and wrote that the bishop of Hippo was a measure above everyone else in intellectual knowledge, he shied away from Augustine's philosophical depths, and was content to accept the general statements of Pope Gregory I.

He repeated the latter's view about the vanity of pagan wisdom and the paucity of secular knowledge, which led to misconceptions and heresies, and distracted man from the correct road. He urged people not to read the works of the ancients, whereas, he himself, contrary to his own

bidding, was gathering an immense library in Seville, in which the Bible and the writings of the church fathers co-existed peacefully with a rich collection of pagan poets and sages. Isidore extolled his library in his verse, which may have been a little lame in metre but abounded in educational enthusiasm. To be sure, such inconsistencies were also commonplace in Isidore's prose and doings. We might have suspected him of insincerity or diplomatic jockeying if he had not been so obviously, so thoroughly and naively, convinced that his utterances were absolutely right.

The roots of this duality should be traced less to Isidore's character, and rather reflect the agonising dual unity of the Christian culture of that time — a summing up of the struggle of the new creed for intellectual and political domination over many centuries. Christianity condemned the pagan wisdom but could not, or perhaps was not always willing, at least subconsciously, to root it out completely. As it grew stronger, the authoritarian Christian doctrine absorbed no few elements of the persecuted pagan wisdom in order to elucidate some crucial theological issues. In doing so, it borrowed freely from that arsenal of methods of philosophising, debating, teaching, and propagating.

Destroying its ideological opponents verbally, and then frequently also physically, the church settled the dilemma once and for all in its own favour. But it did not fail, though never admitting it, to digest the lessons of antique wisdom. This opened up new vital sources and new ways for organisational, political, ideological, and intellectual self-improvement. Isidore's attempt at reconciling outward simplicity with the refined rhetoric and dialectics of the pagans, was neither paradoxical nor negative in relation to the Christian orthodoxy of that time. It only reflected the pliability of the Christian teaching, which allowed for peaceful coexistence with the rigoristic posture of Pope Gregory I.

Both these tendencies would unfold to the full in Western Europe's medieval culture.

Isidore's world outlook did not prevent him from ac-

cepting pagan wisdom, and led him to address it continuously. In objective terms, he considered knowledge one of the most important aims of living, as important as man's aspirations to live by the books of God. "Know much and live right"<sup>2</sup> — those were in Isidore's opinion the two essential components of man's full-blooded being. He produced a treatise, *Synonyms or a Sinful Soul's Lament*, in which he tried to probe the psychological depths of the human spirit. He addressed the despairing, those in agony, the desolate who had lost faith in justice, and urged them to alleviate their pain not by prayer or Christian asceticism, but by deep-going self-analysis and stoic rationalism. Reason, he pointed out, consoled a person lamenting his grief:

"Tear the pain from your heart, remove pain from your spirit, stem the onslaught of pain, do not wallow in pain, conquer the pain of your spirit, conquer the pain of your intellect."<sup>3</sup>

Thereupon, elaborating on Socrates, he continued: "Get to know thyself, oh human, get to know who thou art, when thou originate, why thou art born and for what purpose thou wert brought into the world; get to know how thou art structured, in what setting thou wert reared, and why thou wert created in this world. Do not forget thine title, and cherish the status that is in thy nature."<sup>4</sup>

The way man could recapture himself was through learning. "Learn what you do not know," Isidore urged, "so as not to turn out a useless tutor; first be a student, and thereafter you can instruct: accept the calling of teacher only after you've gained knowledge... Do not lessen your diligence learning and teaching. The knowledge that you absorbed through the ear, emit through the mouth. Your wisdom will multiply if you share it with others. Wisdom grows when given to others, and shrinks when it is held back. Generously distributed knowledge grows fuller, and the more it is drawn upon, the more prolific it becomes."<sup>5</sup>

Then, summing up, he added: "Always be ready to give yourself up to learning, and may you have no idle

time, that is, time in which you do nothing. Let not a single hour pass without your devoting yourself to the study of science." <sup>6</sup>

Isidore himself always lived as he preached. This we see from the large number of his writings, and the analysis that went into them. His favourite authors were Lactantius, Tertullian, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Orosius, and Cassiodorus, and he also read the pagan writers Varro, Servius, Suetonius, Sallust, Lucan, and Lucretius, and the Latin grammarians. But more often than not, he resorted to study aids—*scholia*, commentaries, and *breviaries*. In that respect, he adhered to the school of Roman culture. Thus, he abided by the behest of Pliny the Elder: "That from which no extracts are taken, cannot be considered as being read."

The method of taking abstracts, of studying and composing, dominated the Roman school, and Isidore followed its method. Hence the lapidary style of his encyclopaedic works, which differed so greatly from the measured and imposing prose of his theological treatises, a prose highly valued for its beauty. It was a literary style that even came to be known as Isidorian.

Isidore spoke of the method he followed, based on abstracts, in forewords to many of his writings. He never hesitated to borrow. On the contrary, he considered this an accepted method. For him, writing did not, nor could it, mean creating something fundamentally new. For him, the main purpose of writing was to maintain, sustain, and reinforce tradition. Isidore went out of his way to prevail on the reader that true knowledge had to be sanctified by authority—best of all the Gospel, or the church fathers, but also, among others, by one of the great pagans. He elaborated upon the concept of eternal determination and cognisance of the ultimate truth that resided in God—a concept highly important for understanding the medieval culture—and hence the predominance of authority over creativity.

The task of the scholar or teacher was to construct, compose, or arrange in a system all the known facts rather than discover new ones, that is, shorten flowery and vague



statements, make them comprehensible, and confirm the universal concept of the cosmos. A very great role was attributed to memory, and this not only in the process of learning but also in the being of society and the being of the consciousness. This was reflected in the dominance of tradition and custom, and in the special place which history occupied in medieval society as a specific form of knowledge and a specific social stabiliser.

It seems that Isidore used enlightened monks and scribes of the scriptorium in Seville to do the preparatory spadework for his writings. But their conceptual likeness, the specific rhetoric and linguistic colouring, give us no cause at all to doubt that his works were the labour of one man.

In Isidore's *Etymologies* and a number of other writings, each field of science, each more or less significant doctrine in that field, became an object of study, as did the main features and terms specific for the subject at hand. The seven liberal arts were the foundation, while the grammatical methods were instruments of cognition.

The etymological approach or search for the origins of words became determinative in Isidore's early (probably the first) treatise, *Differentiae*. "In ancient times, people tried to determine distinctions between words," he wrote, "spotting subtle differences of one word from another. The pagan poets, however, spurned the meaning of words to suit the metre of their verse. From them stems the custom to use words without discrimination. Yet, though words may look alike, they differ from one another because each one has its own origins. The first Latin to notice this was Cato, and I followed his example when I wrote or when I borrowed abstracts from the works of other authors."<sup>7</sup>

The first part of *Differentiae* showed distinctions between similar words, and the second dealt with their essence. The material was arranged in alphabetical order—a method first used by Varrius Flaccus in his *De Verborum Significatu*. Isidore differentiated words in pairs when they were close in meaning—*populus* and *plebs*, for example, *recens* and *novus*; he did the same in the case of

notions that sounded similarly, such as *vis-bis*, *hora-ora*, and so on, or of words that were in essence opposite but, at the same time, connected, such as *deus* and *dominus*, *animus* and *anima*, divine grace and human will, active life and contemplative life, etc.

Elaborating upon this method, Isidore wrote: "Etymology is the origin of words when the essence of the word or name is revealed through explanation."<sup>8</sup>

The etymological approach enabled Isidore to reach down into the prime sources of knowledge as he understood them, because the word and what it stood for were for him indissoluble, with the word possessing still greater reality than the thing it denoted. Through terminological search he tried to attain the truth — not only the truth sanctified by the Bible, but also the truth obtained by the intellect. This approach was legitimate for the verbal, rhetoric culture inherited from Antiquity. For many centuries after Isidore, experimental knowledge would remain marginal in European society's spiritual aspirations.

To picture the essence and limits of the intellectual universe constructed by Isidore, we must, of course, look into the content of his *Etymologies*.

The first book, *De Grammatica*, the second, *De Rhetorica et Dialectica*, and the third *De Mathematica* (dealing with arithmetic, geometry, music, and the fourth element of the *quadrivium*, astronomy) were devoted to the traditional late Roman and medieval education. Here, Isidore arranged as a system long since accepted propositions and universally recognised truths. There was no trace of the philosophical approach and the extensive knowledge displayed by Boethius in his *De Arithmetica* and *De Musica*, though Isidore did borrow some of Boethius' formulations. He expounded no theory concerning the purpose of education, as Cassiodorus did in his *Institutiones* seventy years before. In fact, though treading in the latter's footsteps, Isidore did not hesitate to drop all talk about the purpose and basics of writing. For he was active at a time when the idea of a universal Christian culture had already triumphed and needed concrete content rather than philosophical vindication.

Isidore also spoke at greater length on grammar and rhetoric than on the mathematical disciplines. His "philological" preference, in fact, could not have been more obvious.

The fourth book, *De Medicina*, contained the fundamentals of the anatomy and physiology of those times, with descriptions of diseases and the more simple methods of treatment, and information about drugs and medicinal aids. Here, Isidore leaned on the authority of Asclepiades, Hippocrates, and Galen, those distinguished medical scholars of Antiquity. He followed Cassiodorus faithfully in his interest in medicine, and like Cassiodorus held that educated people should have at least a modicum of medical knowledge.

The fifth book, *De Legibus et Temporibus*, dealt with law, and portrayed legendary biblical, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman legislators. It described the laws, both divine and human, and contained general sections on civil, natural, and other laws.

The second part of the book was devoted to specific questions of law, legal standards, definitions of property, and punishment of crimes. Here, Isidore relied basically on Roman law, using as a source the well-known texts of Caius and Ulpian, and referring to the breviary of the Visigothic King Alaric, and to the Theodosian Code. Yet he glossed over in silence the *Corpus Juris Civilis* of Justinian, the Byzantine emperor, although it was the principal legal document of his time. The book contained a chapter, "On Centuries and Ages", in which Isidore set forth Augustine's conception of the six ages of humankind. It also contained a historical world chronicle modelled on those of Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius, covering events from the Creation to the reign of Emperor Heraclius VII.

The sixth book, *On the Bible and Church Services*, was a popular compendium among librarians and scribes of the Middle Ages. Isidore described the history and the principles on which libraries were collected, giving their due not only to the Scriptures and other Christian books, but also to the works of pagan writers. He also spoke here of

the types of books and of the instruments used by scribes. The last few chapters spoke of church services, religious holidays, and the duties of priests. This part of *Etymologies* was imbued with enormous respect for the written word, and inspired the same respect among educated people in the medieval period.

The seventh book dealt with theological issues — the nature of God, the angels, and so on. It discussed patriarchs, and enumerated exhortations to clerics and monks. Book eight continued in the same vein, but its content was more original. It discussed the orthodox religion, the church, and heresies. And Isidore's catalogue of heresies spread far and wide in medieval Western Europe. He referred in brief to the emergence and essence of the deviations practised by numerous sects, and discussed pagans and their deities. There was an interesting section on pagan philosophers, which was like a brief history of antique philosophy. Pagan poets, sybils, magicians and fortune-tellers, Isidore classed as opponents of Christianity.

The first eight books of *Etymologies* are part of a single system, envisaging a step-by-step education: from *trivium* to *quadrivium* to medicine, and on to jurisprudence and theology. This order would take root in universities of the late 12th and the 13th century. And it owes its almost universal adoption to Isidore.

Beginning with book nine, the content of *Etymologies* became more diverse. It appears to have been a reinforcement to the basic educational scheme. A variety of information was given on history, geography, military affairs, ethnography and, using present-day language, demography. Interesting facts were handed on about various tribes, some ancient, others closer to Isidore's own time.

The tenth book interpreted the alphabet, and book eleven, *On the Man and Fabulous Monsters*, contained some of Isidore's philosophical ruminations and a few tales about people with the legs of a horse, one-eyed cyclops, and other exotic creatures who, he contended, lived on the edge of the Earth. Through *Etymologies* this tradition of mixing the real with the unreal, of describing unusual

people and beasts, was borrowed by writers of physiologies and bestiaries popular in the Middle Ages.

The thirteenth book was devoted to cosmography. Here, Isidore wrote, among other things, that "the world is heaven, earth, the sea, and God's creatures on them".<sup>9</sup> He had no doubt whatsoever that the world had been created by God out of nothing and must have an end in time. But he maintained that it was always in motion and that atoms, which were as indivisible as a point in geometry, were its minutest particles. Isidore devoted quite a bit of attention, too, to the four elements, out of which, he said, everything in the world consisted, including man. Thus, mutually exclusive notions coexisted peacefully in *Etymologies*. But this eclecticism was positive, for it enabled to introduce certain elements of the antique philosophy into the Christian conception of the world.

A description of the "circle of lands", of its visible parts, and the subterranean realm, is to be found in book fourteen. Book fifteen, *On Buildings and Lands*, deals with architecture and building in urban and rural surroundings, and also partly with agriculture. Book sixteen is devoted to mineralogy and chemistry, and to the symbolism of stones, gems, and metals. A most detailed description of rural affairs, land use, agronomy, and the like, is to be found in book seventeen. Book eighteen, *On Wars and Games*, discusses military affairs and theatricals all in one lot. Book nineteen, on the other hand, breaks down into three parts, on navigation and the fleet, on buildings (in addition to book fifteen), and on clothing (its types and colours), adornments, sewing instruments, and so on. Food-stuffs, cooking, and domestic utensils, as well as agricultural implements, are the subject of the twentieth and last book.

The world that Isidore portrayed in his *Etymologies*, though outwardly diverse and motley, was intrinsically integral and well organised. It reflected the orderly manner in which the universe functioned, and in which every substance, from the highest to the lowest, from the celestial to the earthly, down to the minutest atom, and each manifestation of human existence from refined cogitation

to everyday life, possessed the right to exist, and had its specific place and purpose, and a definite value. It was this unity that made it possible, and natural too, to discuss the greatest and the smallest, and the seemingly incompatible but in fact indissolubly linked by virtue of their worldly existence.

Unity, system, and organisation — those were the three pillars upon which Isidore constructed his *Etymologies* and, speaking more broadly, his cultural model. Where Boethius, the philosopher, had charted the framework, the parameters for scholastic thinking, and Cassiodorus had worked out the principles of practice and tried to build a model of a future culture, Isidore filled the already outlined intellectual universe with a tangible content, enlivening its theoretical basis with an enormous diversity of facts, which he grouped to reflect the unity and rational design of the cosmos.

This inner integrity of *Etymologies*, for all its outward many-coloured appearance, was, I am sure, spotted by the intellectuals of the Middle Ages, though it entirely escaped the 20th-century positivist critics of Isidore of Seville. It was no accident at all that *Etymologies* became a model for the many *Summae* portraying the essence of the medieval appreciation of the world. Like the brilliant decoration of medieval cathedrals, which did not prevent the beholder from seeing the clear and attractive architectural design, so the diversity of subject matter in the medieval *Summae* did not prevent the reader from seeing the inner logic of their intellectual construction, which reflected the hierarchic structure of being and thought.

Encyclopaedism was always conceived as a systematic exposition of knowledge accumulated in a specific era. It called for a universalisation of the intellectual culture set forth upon a definite philosophical foundation. The encyclopaedic tradition of the Hellenistic era, which flourished most strikingly in Rome, acquired special significance for the West European culture. Here every more or less conspicuous stage was punctuated by encyclopaedic treatises. This held true not only in the Middle Ages,

when *Summae* of all kinds were highly popular, but also for modern times. And, mind you, the medieval vision of the world, encyclopaedically substantiated through the efforts of the savants of that time, was also destroyed by means of the *Encyclopaedia*, that great creation of the French Enlighteners. While the spirit of mechanistic rationalism which imbued the great *Encyclopaedia* was, in its turn, shaken by the dialectics which Hegel developed in his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*.

Isidore of Seville, who practised the encyclopaedic approach in his highly diverse and effective writings, had set out to resolve a double-barrelled problem, that of preserving the antique heritage and of arranging knowledge as a system in order to create a specific type of culture. Isidore's conception of culture had at its core specific notions of the world, of God, and of man, round which he grouped his ideas about all other matters. In substance, notions of this kind were the nucleus of any vision of the world, reflecting the specific attitude of the consciousness to being, and of the Spirit to Nature.

It is common knowledge that in the Middle Ages, in the early stages of which Isidore functioned, this attitude was idealistic, and rather theological, that is, part of the system of religious notions. But this did not mean absence of ambiguity; nor did it mean that the matter was treated similarly throughout the more than ten centuries comprising the Middle Ages. The interpretations of even the orthodox medieval thinkers differed substantially when presenting the picture of the world, while the dissenting outlook ranged from extreme mysticism to a peculiar type of materialism.

Though there has been an impressive number of literary studies of Isidore in the past half a century, the crucial aspect of his world outlook — the relation of God, the world, and the man — highly significant for the subsequent course of medieval thinking, has remained in the shade. This, I think, is due to two things: the issue was traditionally associated with the history of philosophy or theology, whereas Isidore was least of all a philosopher. As theologian, on the other hand, he was appreciated

more for his discussions of a moral nature. His ontological views were considered unoriginal and common. But it was for the very reason that they were universally accepted, that they deserved to be examined. They were typical for the entire long stretch of medieval history. Still, Isidore produced a few far from trivial ontological ideas, which later were given an unorthodox interpretation. And that, too, makes them an important subject for study if we want to trace the evolution of medieval thought.

In his first treatise, *Differentiae*, which was of a philological nature, Isidore drew a line between the creation of the world (*creatio*) and its formation (*formatio*). The world's inception was one of the crucial points of difference between the antique philosophy and Christian theology. And Isidore's posing this question was an echo of the trinitarian and Christological controversies that had bedevilled the Mediterranean world for many centuries. It was therefore doubly natural for Visigothic Spain, where the orthodox religion had triumphed only a few years before the writing of *Differentiae*. The main purpose of the treatise was to prove that definite philosophical points were correct, and to warn against straying into heresy. This was borne out by the complete title of Isidore's treatise, *Differences or the Proper Meaning of Words*. It was also borne out by the explanation of the distinctions between Trinity and Unity, the person and the subsistence, the law and the Gospel, between divine grace and free will, between heresy and schism, etc., which are so fundamental for Christianity.

Isidore provided short explanations for the key issue of cosmology, the inception of the world, in the second part of *Differentiae*, which, unlike the first part, is not devoted to distinctions between words but to distinctions between things (*differentia rerum*). Since Isidore was an orthodox, it was natural to assume that he would deliver the concept of the creation as it is delivered in the Bible. Yet he drew a distinction between *creatio* and *formatio* — a fairly unexpected thing if we consider his general principles, his world outlook. In substance, he did not say, as an orthodox Christian should, that God created the world out of



nothing. Isidore said that initially God created matter, which he, Isidore, apprehended as substance and not a mere possibility of becoming (as did Plato and his followers).

Was it because Isidore detected the duality of his view that he ended his statement with a quotation from Pope Gregory's *Moralia*? Or did he not notice that his interpretation of the Creation was, in effect, a departure from the orthodox view? I am inclined to think that he overlooked it, because he built upon this interpretation, saying that the initial foundation of everything created existed at once, while the species and the forms appeared after a time. What he said later was still more categorical: "At first was created formless matter in which heaven and earth were not separated, and which the Greeks called chaos. Out of this there emerged individual species and forms."

There followed a fairly liberal reference to the Gospel in which the epithets given to the Earth in Genesis, namely, "dark and disorderly", were referred by Isidore to matter.<sup>10</sup>

True, Isidore seemed to spot his error; he said: "But matter was created out of nothing, whereas the world and the species were created out of formless matter." In a bid to eliminate the contradiction, he went on to say: "But he who resides in eternity, created everything simultaneously. It follows that God did not create all things out of nothing, but some things out of other things, and some things out of nothing. Out of nothing he created the world, the angels and the soul; and he created men and other earthly creatures out of something else."<sup>11</sup>

This led Isidore into a still greater contradiction, because what he said meant, in effect, that the corporeal world and the incorporeal substances had been created out of nothing, while man and all earthly creatures were created out of something else, not out of nothing, but out of matter.

As we see, Isidore's idea of the inception of the world was set forth in a most confusing manner. Admittedly, it was fundamentally creationist, but some of its details con-

tradicted the traditional Christian outlook. It contained a thought that went back to the mythological notions, namely, that at the beginning of time there had been chaos, and that chaos was matter. It also contained the thought that God created nothing "directly", that he first created matter, which he later "formed" or shaped. Faintly, this reminds us of Plato's *Timaeus*, in which matter was treated as a possibility of individuating, carrying into effect, and giving form. The six days of creation, Isidore assumed, were nothing but imparting species and form to formless matter. The proliferation of forms, as he saw it, was associated with the motion of time.

Are we to understand therefrom that matter, as such, remained outside of time? On the other hand, despite his linking the "forming" of matter with time, Isidore believed that God created everything simultaneously. He pointed out further that God did not create everything out of matter, that he created some things out of nothing. Did Isidore think that matter was nothing, that it was non-being in the generic sense (as Plotinus had thought)? Or was matter different from "nothing", being a formless substance that contained the possibility of form, as Aristotle had thought?

Isidore employed two notions—*species* and *forma*—without defining their distinctions. It is quite possible that he borrowed them from Augustine, who had used them in an analogous context. Nor is it entirely clear on what grounds Isidore maintained that a part of the Creation was created from "nothing" and another part from something else. Was this a curt and vague transmission of Augustine's talk of two types of matter,<sup>12</sup> which was itself a specific interpretation of Aristotle?

This view is confirmed by the position which Isidore expounded in his *Sententiae*: the matter out of which the world was created preceded it "as sound precedes the song".<sup>13</sup>

The matter out of which the Earth and the Heaven were created was essentially "corporeal", "containing the ability to apprehend and to embody form corporeally".<sup>14</sup>

Did this imply existence of "spiritual" and "corporeal"

matter, as it did in Augustine? I would not be too emphatic about that, but it is incontestable that Isidore expounded, in vague terms, the thought that matter was not homogeneous. This idea would recur, and take clearer shape, in the unorthodox assertions of the mystic Bonaventura and in Duns Scotus' "realistic monism". It was to be found, too, in ibn-Gabirol, a Jewish philosopher who lived in the 11th century in Spain and whose writings spread across Europe in the 12th century as translated by Gundisalvi.

Isidore showed no wish to discuss the subject further. And though he was one of the most educated men of his time, his reasoning betrayed incomprehension of Augustine's approach and, I daresay, fairly superficial knowledge of Augustine's writings. Indeed, the predomination of Augustine, as Isidore saw it, was the predomination of his prestige and authority, not his method or conception.

Isidore was also careless in dealing with the Scriptures. The only other explanation is that maybe he had used some older, uncanonical, text of the Bible. In any case, the picture of the Creation as given by Isidore, contained elements that were far from orthodox. It is an interesting point that none of Isidore's contemporaries, and none of those who succeeded him, spotted the "seditious" nature of his reasoning. Though it was strongly reminiscent of some of the philosophical views roundly condemned by the Catholic church in the 13th century.

This may mean that he was misunderstood, because even his eclectic learnedness was far too subtle for the readers of his works to apprehend. Or else, and this was more likely, his authority and prestige created an aura of infallibility.

All the same, this reasoning contained a concealed ferment that created confusion in the minds of people. More than five centuries before Averroës, Spain, only recently the harbour of the Arian heresy and Priscillianism, whose traces were also evident in the thinking of Isidore, the chief authority on Catholicism of that time, heard statements Isidore made which, though vaguely, were consonant with some of the Averroist ideas. They did not reso-

nate at the dawn of medievalism. But ideas lead a bizarre and intricate existence. Who knows, perhaps the confused reasoning of Isidore was one of the elements of the soil upon which, in due course, sprouted the seeds of the medieval intellectual radicalism? Whether or not the Arab-speaking thinkers of Spain, from whose writings "materialist" ideas spread to Western Europe, had acquainted themselves with the works of Isidore in the libraries of Seville and Granada, the latter had hardly aroused their interest. But ideas are assimilated all the better if they in some way remind us of something we knew before. This was probably the case with Isidore's ideas, which had in a way prepared the ground for West European thinkers to apprehend the radical thoughts of the Arab philosophers.

Isidore's treatment of God, who formed a unity with his Creation, who "filled" all Creation, reminiscent of his predecessor Cassiodorus' analogous view, made the emergence of Erigena's pantheism, according to which the Creator and his Creation were one, more credible. In substance, these thoughts were ever present in the context of the early medieval culture, having been introduced into otherwise wholly orthodox writings. And put down in writing, they, consequently, survived and were always at hand to be promoted and enlarged upon if propitious circumstances arose.

The question of the relation between the non-orthodox and the orthodox in the writings of the classics of medieval culture is far more intricate than previously believed. It transcends the philosophical and theological framework as such. As we see in Isidore's case, unobtrusively presented ideas that were essentially contrary to Catholic orthodoxy survived until they acquired a social as well as intellectual keenness. Due to changed historical circumstances.

But how did Isidore picture the world after it was created, and after it acquired form? To begin with, he saw the world as a mobile entity congruent with time, changeable, diverse, abounding in a multitude of species and forms. It contrasted with the immobile, timeless and unchanging, One God. When setting forth these tradi-

tional ideas, however, Isidore was particularly interested in two things: what compounded the world's diversity, and how did the visible and invisible worlds, that is the material and spiritual worlds, relate to one another?

The world was heaven, earth, the sea (water) and what was in them. Together they made up the cosmos. The foundation of the world consisted of atoms, those minute particles out of which all things were made. In essence, Isidore conceived atoms as indivisible first causes out of which the diversity of all being was constituted. He noted that atoms were corporeal, temporal, numerary, and literal. In his discussion of atoms (in *Etymologies*), Isidore was influenced by Lucretius, a Roman materialist poet and author of a poem, *De Natura Rerum*. Atoms were the original matter, as Isidore saw it, out of which everything was created. With references to the Greeks, Isidore maintained that the original matter consisted of four elements: earth, fire, air, and water. He did not connect the theory of atoms and the theory of elements in any definite way, and was quite obviously, like Lucretius, content to identify the elements and media. Each medium corresponded to a distinct part of the world and was inhabited by specific creatures: heaven (fiery ether) was given over to the angels, the air to the birds, the sea to the fish, and the earth to people and beasts. God resided outside the world of movement and, consequently, outside the system of media. Isidore, in fact, followed the quadripartite scheme of the late Roman school, in which the elements, the seasons, the liquids of the human body, and the temperaments of people were united. The North, located between frost and humidity, was associated with water, winter, phlegm and the phlegmatic temperament; the South, located between heat and aridity, with fire, summer, yellow bile, and the choleric temperament; the East, situated between heat and humidity, with air, spring, blood, and the sanguine temperament; the West, situated between frost and dryness, with the earth, autumn, black bile, and the melancholy temperament. Isidore set forth the same scheme in his treatise, *De Natura Rerum*, in which he illustrated it graphically. Isidore's scheme was evidence of the extraord-

inary tenacity of the antique Greek world outlook, beginning with Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato. The latter interpreted the *stoiheja* (elements) as the beginning of the world. Besides, for Plato Empedocles' "beginnings" were geometric. Aristotle made the concept *stoiheja* a philosophic term. Cicero cultivated this theory on Roman soil, and Lucretius presented it in his poem. The theory took root in Roman philosophy and literature, and it also cropped up in the writings of the Christian theologians. As we see, therefore, Isidore could have availed himself of several different sources.

Isidore lined all things up in the traditional order: inanimate, animate, unreasonable, reasonable, mortal, and immortal. And above this hierarchic pyramid towered God. Explaining this scheme, Isidore noted that the inanimate stood for what did not grow and was immobile, as for instance, stones. The animate was what grew, lived, but had no sensual powers, as, for instance, trees. The unreasonable encompassed not only what grew and lived but also what felt but could not think, as, for instance, cattle. Then followed those who grew, lived, felt and reasoned but were mortal, as animals and, partly, humans. Those who felt, thought and were immortal, as, for instance, angels, came next, and above them was the immobile and infinite God who governed the world. In sum, Isidore gave us six grades of what existed. And, curiously, there was a place in this hierarchy for demons, expelled from the higher celestial spheres and consigned to the air.

Everything under the heavens was created for man, and man was created for himself. He stood apart from all God's creatures. He was like God. As Isidore put it, he was the abode of reason, wisdom, and eloquence, and was stronger in science than in the properties of Nature. He stood erect, with face upturned. That made all men alike, though each had his own appearance. They had an immortal soul, but their senses were imperfect, their bodies were subject to decay, and they were light-minded. They differed from each other in their ways, were not the same in their mistakes, lazy in learning, self-indulgent

in carnal pleasures, and indifferent to labour. They were attracted by riches, torn by cares, and mortal to a man. They were not sure of their descendants, and complained about life, which was transient. They acquired wisdom with difficulty, but headed towards death with ease, were naked before the past, wretched before the present, and ignorant before the future. They were steeped in injustices, were born in sin, lived in labour, and died in grief.

Isidore's description was dual: man was powerful but also weak, he was master of the world but not master of his life. This duality was rooted in his nature, which was simultaneously material and spiritual, mortal and immortal. Carnally, he was an animal, but his spirit and reason elevated him above all other living things.

It was one of the key ideas in Greek philosophy, from the pre-Socratic on, that the cosmos and man were closely linked and, more, that man was an analogue of the universe. Democritus elaborated on the idea that man was a microcosm, and Plato took it further in *Timaeus*, as did the Stoics with their inclination for treating the cosmos as a living organism. The parallel fabric of the world (the macrocosm) and man (the microcosm) was reflected in patristic literature, both Latin and Greek, and in the philosophic commentaries of late Antiquity, notably in those of Chalcides, Macrobius, and thereupon Boethius. Isidore followed in the footsteps of his predecessors.

He maintained that the existence of the world and the life of man were governed by one and the same plan. This was what led Isidore to compare the ages of the world and the ages of man. And his parallelist idea about the living cosmos and man was agreeable to medieval thinkers. It was reflected in the views of the Chartres school, notably those of Bernard Sylvester, and in the classic scholasticism. That Isidore had handed down this idea from Antiquity to the Middle Ages is borne out by the fact, among others, that Robert Grosseteste spelled it out in the 13th century in a passage he had taken verbatim from Isidore's *Differentiae*. The parallelist idea reached the mass consciousness, cropping up in the visions of medieval visionaries, notably Hildegard of Bingen. To some extent, the

idea also inspired the new anthropology of Pico della Mirandola in the Renaissance period.

Isidore compared the parts of the human body with the parts of the world, which he conceived as anthropomorphic: "The head," he wrote, "reaches to the heavens, and it has two eyes, much like the light of the Sun and the Moon. Its breathing is like the air, because breathing generates inhalation and exhalation, much as the movement of the winds in the air. The belly may be compared to the sea, for it gathers all the liquids as the sea gathers water. Lastly, the soles of the feet may be compared to the earth, because they are dry and contain heat like the earth. True reason resides in the head that rises above the body, like God in the heavens, so that it can observe and direct all things from above."<sup>15</sup>

Comparing man to the world and the world to man was an essential element of the medieval consciousness, both elitist and that of the masses. The antique macrocosm-microcosm concept fitted splendidly into the barbarian concept of close links between Man and Nature, and absence of any distinct borderline between man's body and the body of the world. Their synthesis fructified the medieval consciousness.

Describing parts of the human body, Isidore was prompted by the grammatical rather than philosophic tradition. He offered etymologies that had nothing to do with the actual functioning of the parts of the body. He merely followed the example of antique authors, from Pseudo-Soranus to Cassius. It would be more correct to say that Isidore continued this peculiar understanding of usefulness that ignored functional factors and concentrated on the aesthetic, symbolic or rhetorical value.

Isidore put the Earth at the centre of the world. It was at equal distances from its edges. The outer border was the Ocean. The Earth itself consisted of three parts: Asia, Africa, and Europe. In the easternmost part of Asia was Paradise, of which Isidore provided a detailed description, with a river flowing from a single source and breaking up into four streams. In Isidore's view Paradise was inhabited by incorporeal angels. Spring there was ever-



lasting. The description of Paradise was made part of a real geographic inventory and neighbours on descriptions of India, Parthia, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Phoenicia, and so on. It was not put outside the limits of the existing world. The divine and mundane were not separated. The borderline between them was not in the macrocosm but in the microcosm, in the human existence, in the ethical and moral sphere. One passed easily into the other. Angels lived alongside people. Paradise had borders with actually existing lands. The celestial forces influenced life on earth.

Isidore, author of *Etymologies*, was surprisingly bereft of any feeling about the verticality of the world, of the gaping abyss between paradise and the inferno. His world was more serene than, say, that of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with its exceedingly high and practically inaccessible paradise and the inferno. Yet there were no few points of similarity. In Isidore's opinion, the nether world was at the centre of the Earth. He calls it the antique way: *Hia-tus*, *Profundum*, *Barathrum*, and *Taurus*. There was also the Acheron, the river of woe and despair, and Cocytus, the ice-cold lake where Dante would place sinners who had deceived the trusting, that is, those who committed the gravest sin of all.

To sum up, Isidore's world was spherical, alive, an anthropomorphous cosmos at the centre of which was the earth, the abode equally of real people, beasts, birds, and plants, and a biblical paradise separated from the earthly world by an invisible boundary. The earthly world and the earth were not identical. The earthly world was first of all the sphere of human existence, while the earth was something more extensive, incorporating among other things the mystic notion of paradise. This multiple view of the earth, as Isidore saw it, made it the centre of the world, a cosmic body, land and the circle of lands, the abode of life. It was at once the location of paradise (meaning that, in substance, it went over into heaven) and also encompassed the real world, which passed into an imaginary world, one that had a special religious reality about it. The earth was at once the soil out of which

man's body was made and to which that body would turn after death. The earth fed all life, yet was also an object to which humans applied their strength and energy, for it was intended for cultivation.

The earth also had its secret — its infernal part. It was a place for life and for death, a place of reward and punishment, because it encompassed both paradise and hell. Isidore's conception of the earth as the centre, which built upon the intellectual and book knowledge of the preceding era, "earthed" intricate philosophical and theological notions not only in a figurative but also a literal sense, giving them a tangible, sensual form that was more acceptable to the ordinary mind and was more conveniently consumed by the mass of the people. This was made apparent by Isidore's description of all the creatures that inhabited the earth.

As I have said before, it was fundamentally important to Isidore that the world was created for Man. Reason and spirit were qualities that elevated man above all other creatures. The difference between man and beast was that man consisted of body and soul, with the latter animating him. He comprised a spiritual system (*compactio*), possessed reason, free will, and ability for sin and virtue. The individual chose between vice and virtue of his own free will, and became truly virtuous given the divine blessing. Isidore believed, like Augustine, that all people were sinful from birth. For Isidore this was especially significant in the socio-ethical context. When determining man's place in the "physical" world, he withdrew into the shade. For him the most important factor here was that man had reason. "Not by his good deeds and not by his corporeal perceptions does man stand out from the animal world," he wrote, "but by virtue of his reason."<sup>16</sup>

Isidore suggested the grades of human knowledge which he took from the ancients: corporeal feeling, sensations, and carnal senses were of the lowest grade; the imagination (*imago*) based on memory (*memoria*) came next; then direct cogitation (*cogitatio*) encompassing the present, and finally reason (*mens*) that anticipated the future.

For the highest grades of knowledge Isidore also used such synonyms as intellect, intelligence, and the mind.

His reason man derived from being spiritual, that is, from being endowed with a soul (*anima*) and spirit (*animus*). The soul was man's vital power, and the spirit was what ennobled the soul, elevating it not only by cogitation, but also by the will.

Alongside the spiritual and rational aspects, Isidore considered man's corporeal existence or what he called the exterior man (*exterior homo*). When examining the difference of man's outer appearance from that of animals in his *Etymologies*, he referred to Ovid.<sup>17</sup> He distinguished between the flesh and the body (as the form), and described the parts of the human body in detail, giving their functional and aesthetic worth. For him many parts of the body were not only useful, but also beautiful. The head, he noted for example, had hair to protect and adorn it. And I daresay he hinted at the connection between the differentiation of parts of the body and their different functions. This was especially apparent in how he contrasted man and woman.

That Isidore displayed an interest in the physical aspect of human life is borne out by his including a book on medicine in his *Etymologies*. It came right after the exposition of the seven liberal arts.

Isidore considered medicine on Galen's model a means of preserving health, of preventing and treating disease. Researchers considered that Isidore had no knowledge of practical medicine. But he was the first to include it among the principal intellectual pursuits of the Middle Ages, and conserve the Greco-Roman medical vocabulary. William Sharp, who had among other things studied and translated Isidore's book on medicine into English, observed that the scholar's contribution to European medicine was no less significant, considering the time he had lived in, than that of Andreas Vesalius and William Harvey.

Isidore, the enlightener of Visigothic Spain, shared the misconceptions of his predecessors and contemporaries

about the world being inhabited by various odd creatures and ghouls alongside man and beast.

He referred people with visible physical deviations from normal (and here he was wholly realistic) to the group of what he called *portensa*, and creatures we would call fantastic or imaginary to another group. *Etymologies* absorbed information from geographic treatises of late Antiquity, which staggered the imaginations of the gullible over many centuries. The fantastic creatures comprehended mythical giants, cyclops, the giant triple-headed Geryon who was said to be living in Spain, the Gorgons, Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Hydra, and the Minotaur, the Blemnia and Libia monsters with eyes on their chests, satyrs, fauns, people with canine heads, hippopods, men with ears so large they covered the body whom Isidore located in mysterious Scythia, twisted and hunched artobolites who allegedly resided in India, scyphiform creatures fixed to the earth in Ethiopia, antipodes, pygmies, and so on.

The animals and beasts Isidore divided into domestic and wild. It is safe to assume that the later West European bestiaries followed Isidore's cataloguing of animals, for they repeated his descriptions to the minutest detail. And while his descriptions of domesticated animals were of interest for the history of the productive forces, his descriptions of most of the beasts to be found in medieval manuscripts, paintings and sculptures were no less important for the history of culture. Artists of the Middle Ages might not have been under any immediate influence of *Etymologies*. It was more likely that the common images they depicted were common artistic ideals and reflections. Still, there is no denying that Isidore's reputation as the authority who systematised and catalogued Nature did make some impact on the traditional medieval conception of the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

There is a link between Isidore's descriptions and the armorial or heraldic bearings of medieval Western Europe. The Seville scholar produced descriptions of practically all the animals and birds (not excepting imaginary creatures) that were subsequently reproduced in coats-

of-arms and other heraldic material. This included lions, panthers, leopards, tigers, wolves, foxes, dogs, lynxes, bears, rhinoceroses, elephants, monkeys, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, cats, polecats, badgers, dolphins, lizards, snakes, and so on. Nor did Isidore forget the birds: eagles, vultures, falcons, hawks, crows, swans, kingfishers, pelicans, storks, peacocks, thrushes, and so on. He also described a dragon, sirens, the Centaur, and the basilisk, king of the serpents; the salamander, able to live in fire, the Phoenix, a bird which lived for 500 or 600 years and then consumed itself in fire, rising renewed from the ashes; the Stymphalian birds from Greek mythology, and so on.

The influence of the barbarian "animalistic" style on the medieval art is obvious. But it is safe to say that the "learned" culture of the early Middle Ages, as represented by Isidore, gravitated towards an intermingling with that style. This applied above all to a certain taste for describing the animal kingdom, which we see so clearly in Isidore, the initiator of the medieval West European bestiaries.

The interest in animals in the Middle Ages was mostly fired by man's immediate contact with the animal kingdom. But it was also generated by books and writings. The schematic and conventional depiction of animals in, say, medieval manuscripts, leads me to believe that some artists portrayed what they had read about rather than seen. Book descriptions were superimposed on ordinary notions and immediate impressions, thus giving us one more example of the popular concept, the concept nurtured by the masses, and the concept of the scholar, savant and writer.

Isidore offered a fairly detailed examination of plant life. He dealt with things of a botanical nature, and then went on to the world of inanimate nature, classifying stones and gems, and other natural substances.

There was little or no moralising in Isidore's depictions of natural phenomena, so common in the hexamérons and bestiaries of other medieval writers. True, if we compare Isidore's cosmology and description of the world with the natural science writings of Aristotle, Theo-

phrastus, Ptolemy, or even Pliny, we will at once see that he had compressed the facts to the utmost, enabling historians of the early 20th century to claim that he was entirely devoid of meaning. But to begin with, Isidore did not, nor could he, see himself as a researcher (in the modern sense of the word). His approach had nothing to do with a natural science approach; it was rhetorico-grammatic.

Looking at things in the light of modern science, which is based on experience and experiment, verification and analysis, Isidore's method does not stand up to criticism. But such was the knowledge of his time (which, to be fair, had never been rated too highly since). More, such was the knowledge of antique times, so fervently revered, and it was the knowledge of the so variously perceived Middle Ages. For in medieval times knowledge never transcended mere reflection of individual phenomena in speculative, particular or universal, philosophical notions. To be sure, in those long-drawn-out historical epochs, science was anything but real science.

Absence of experiments did not mean, however, that knowledge of the world and of man as such, was totally absent. For though the cognitive methods of those days were unscientific or protoscientific, they enabled man and mankind to attain considerable advances. This also applied to forms of cognition other than artistic. Some fundamental notions of present-day science were contained in embryo in antique knowledge and that of the Middle Ages, when it was obtained empirically or through purely philosophical cogitation, the thought being clothed in the word that was often identified with the world. To know meant to have an approved idea of an endless enumeration of words. The word was perceived not as an ephemeral likeness of a thing, but as a still greater reality than the thing in question. To give a name meant acquiring knowledge of the essence of a thing or phenomenon, or, in other words, to halt their endless movement in time.

A refined philosophical idealism reposed on the realism of the child who believed that the table against whose corner it had hurt itself should be punished. At the same time, creating the world through knowledge meant creat-

ing the word which imparted form, stabilised the essence, and cut new creatures and things. Was this not the origin of the tendencies that gained ground in the antique world and retained their meaning in the Middle Ages, namely: universalisation, cataloguing and scrupulous systematising of knowledge and the word; the wish to create a rigid construction of formal logic, and also that uninhibited, ir-repressible coinage of words and images, giving free rein to the most extraordinary of fantasies.

This contradiction, though it astonished contemporary scholars—was it not really a dialectical unity of culture that treated the word with a specific, now forfeited, care. For was it not the word that helped humanity in its tiresome spiritual labours to reach down to the secrets of the universe, just as in the toilsome and painstaking labour of tillers and craftsmen it gathered experience grain by grain and assimilated the surroundings and Nature. The spiritual and physical development of the world went hand in hand, crossing each other's paths at times. But the moments of contact were much too rare to create a new synthesis, that of truly scientific knowledge.

In Antiquity and the Middle Ages there had been periods when these tendencies came closer together, and other periods when they moved apart. This was due to different reasons at different times, but quite clearly the differences tended to grow into a gaping abyss in the last few centuries of Antiquity. The culture of thinking, which was polished over the ages, set out in search of the absolute. Neoplatonism, the most synthetic and the most abstract system of philosophy, came into the world. Here the notion and the word attained such extreme abstraction and symbolism that only a small group of the initiated could understand them. This, in effect, turned them into a kind of codex of the sages.

In Christianity, on the other hand, which claimed to be the sole genuine vision of the world, the word gained substance and became the embodiment of God, the link that cemented the mundane and human world with the celestial and divine. But between those two poles there existed, changing all the time, the "everyday reality" of the word

as a means of human communication and an element of literature, education, and knowledge. And nothing but a reflection of those two poles fell upon that element.

One of the strongest currents here was the rhetorical school tradition which had long since lost its appreciation of the philosophical depth of words and did not care to reach down to their rockbottom sense. Still, it continued to revere the word as the repository and transmitter of strictly limited information. Culture of eloquence substituted here for the culture of thinking. Proper or fitting transmission of a ready meaning was valued more highly than passing on new thoughts.

Thinking was not expected to move forward. It was to pulsate within the framework of universal verities. Small wonder that Isidore himself, a devotee of that line, fenced off from each other the words "fact", "word", "invention" and "novelty". He did not claim in any of his writings that he was blazing new trails. Nor did he blaze any; he merely demonstrated, arranged in a system, and recorded principles and things which, as he saw it, neither arose nor were created, and existed beyond question, merely making their appearance in words.

Isidore carried on with the line of the scholiasts. He prided himself for being one of a chain of enlighteners and educators, for upholding their authority. This, he held, made his work valuable and significant. It was an example he set of how predecessors should be treated by those prominent in medieval culture, among others. Continuity was in Isidore's opinion a most important condition for cultural advancement. Culture could not be created in a vacuum, knowledge out of ignorance, and authority out of defamation. This Isidore repeated insistently in the introductions to most of his writings. And the chief means securing cultural continuity was the word, because apprehending being meant cognition through words and by means of words.

"Words are those magic mirrors that reflect the image of the outside world," wrote Isidore's countryman, Ramón del Valle Inclán, the Spanish writer, thirteen centuries later. "Like matrices, they record the experience of



generations incomparable to that which we accumulate in the short duration of our own existence. Words give form to our thinking, they give impulse to our thinking, they give it guidance, and impart to it quite unexpected twists and turns. They are as substantially elementary as life itself."

All the aforesaid may be largely referred to Isidore, for he apprehended the world through the word, through reading. The world's reflection in words had so much significance for Isidore that he conceived it as a greater subjective reality than what was reflected. The world might have been said to double. The real world acquired one more existence in the element of words. Isidore floated in a space of verbal likenesses of the world and of things. They became realities of the world of culture with its specific laws, links, and manners of expression. It was a world where everything was so designed that man, a creature which could ascend to the highest truth, but could also at any moment transgress, was held up not by angels but by the might and power of words, from the loftiest to the most utilitarian.

Isidore made no effort to penetrate the secrets of the world around him. He constructed his own model of the world by verbal means. He codified notions and words, and shied clear of the realnesses of Nature. Where reality and notion corresponded, he passed this on by reflecting the former in its true light. If there was a falling out between reality and notion, preference was given to the word. This followed naturally from Isidore's general methodological principles, for to him words and the rhetoric tradition were weightier than experience and action. Such was the foundation upon which reposed the antique and medieval system of knowledge.

Isidore's writings were a vehicle that passed this tradition down from one epoch to the next. I cannot help recalling a phrase spoken by his illustrious predecessor, Boethius, though on a different occasion: "It is no use casting nets in the hills if you want to catch fish." And it is no use setting demands on Isidore's writings that he simply could not meet. He had created nothing essentially

novel from the point of view of natural science, the Earth and Man. Yet his part in the making and advancement of medieval knowledge and culture, and on a broader plane in the advancement of West European thought, is conspicuous enough. He had gathered grain by grain everything that could still be salvaged of the antique science of the World and Man, and did so in a situation that was most complicated for mankind's cultural advancement. He polished the method of arranging knowledge in a system by taking as the foundation the grammatical culture, the method of searching for, and codifying the origins of things, even though he presented them as notions rather than phenomena of Nature. Here, however, he was a worthy successor of the antique encyclopaedism.

Whatever his method, Isidore managed to produce an integral picture of the world in which Christian and antique ideas intertwined, and which survived tenaciously for many centuries not only in the "learned" culture of the Middle Ages, but also in the consciousness of the masses. He managed to incorporate in the intellectual universe of the Middle Ages a set of natural sciences as its essential component, thus giving them a legitimate footing in the framework of the Christian vision of the world, and whetting the medieval savants' interest in knowing natural phenomena. In the early period of what were also known as the Dark Ages this had been a labour of enormous historical importance.

But Isidore himself was more absorbed by the world of man than that of Nature. His *Etymologies* reflected all aspects of the life of man and society — psychology and social arrangements, everyday living and town planning, ordinary standards of morality and standards of law, education and instruction, various types of work and various types of entertainment. To understand Isidore and the difference of his conceptions from antique encyclopaedism, we must note that he saw an enormous field for activity outside exclusively theoretical knowledge and the school, and outside the church and the obligations to and of the state. We must also note that he described and classified the diverse and vitally necessary occupations of

man, man's manner of living, as well as the exceedingly important though not directly productive realm of games that imitated life and enabled people to accumulate experience, psychological included. We must note that he regarded war as the antithesis of peace, which he prized highly. All these pieces fall into an integrated socio-cultural pattern. Isidore examined it in the second half of his *Etymologies*.

Isidore described the various ways in which social and political human communities were organised. He classified the types of earthly rulers, stating that they were not only endowed with power and dignity, but also bore obligations to their subjects. He "modified" Augustine's conception in favour of the state, pointing out that the authority of the church should be aligned (or come to terms) with authority of the state, that it should be moral rather than political. The ruler's efforts should concentrate on consolidating the state and tightening the links between his subject peoples as between parts of the body. The unity was to be spiritual first of all, based on a common ideology, a common faith and morality, as well as the principles of justice and law. None but a just ruler could count on his people's loyalty.

In the social sense, as Isidore saw it, a people was an assembly of individuals associated by common consent and united by laws adopted by common consent. A people (*populus*), however, was not homogeneous. It included "elders" and the plebs. In some cases, it encompassed the country's entire population (*civitas*).

True, Isidore was inconsistent in using the term "*civitas*", and was inclined to use it in the meaning of a city.<sup>18</sup> He enumerated the traditional landmarks of a Roman city—the municipality, forum, curia, praetorium, capitol, gymnasium, and also the circus, the baths, and the cesspit. He listed dwellings, holy edifices, mainly various types of antique temples, but also a few Christian ones—monasteries and other cenobitic communities, basilicas, and martyries—and his enumeration could well have served as a guide for some abstract city of the late antique period.

By departing from the realities of his own time, Isidore possibly wanted to suggest a kind of ideal community, which was for him related to a harmonious past rather than the chaotic present or the not quite definite future. This seems to be so, because even when pointing out the distinctions between holy places, Isidore employed a purely pagan vocabulary: "What you call sacred are places dedicated to the higher gods; what you call pious is dedicated to the lower gods, and what you call holy is something that has a holiness about it."<sup>19</sup>

The law, as Isidore saw it, was a means for uniting the people. He cited the great legislators, from the biblical Moses and Hermes Trismegistus to Emperor Theodosius the Great. Thereupon, he dealt with the accepted division of law into divine and human, and classified it as natural, civic, international, military, public, sacred, and so on. The fifth book of the *Etymologies* was a brief compendium of Roman jurisprudence. Isidore reflected at length, but in a purely rhetoric spirit, about good and bad judges, and their duties and obligations. He thought rulers should on all accounts discuss laws with the people and obtain the latter's consent.

Here and there, of course, the realities of the times did break through Isidore's rhetoric. He mentioned the barbarian burghs, the Germanic office-holders, and the "armed people", whom we easily identify as the Germanic warriors of that period. But the influence of the times was strongest where Isidore discussed the relationship between the "elect", that is those of higher social standing, and the "poor". Isidore gave this antithesis different interpretations. He contraposed the "praepositi", that is, the secular and ecclesiastic elite, to rank-and-file members of the state and church. The elite, he held, should care for the welfare of all the others. As for the "poor", they were the paupers, that is, the oppressed part of the population practically bereft of property, the dependents, the colons, the peasants, and so on. (The Councils of Toledo, too, had time and again raised the subject of the "poor".) But Isidore also meant the "poor" in a moral, religious sense, that is, those who were denied

God's grace, and consequently needed pastoral care more than others.

We may recall that in those hard times, the Christian concept of "saintly poverty" resounded once again as a special, even in a certain sense, godly, condition. It was a concept which figured conspicuously in the period of early Christianity, and was then all but forgotten during the church struggle for political predominance.

Isidore seemed to be inspired by that concept. He condemned oppression of the "poor". He insisted that they should be protected, that mercy should be shown them. In substance, his views were contiguous with the current known as the "theology of poverty". But while he called for mercy to the "poor" he also demanded punishment, where they should breach the law or lift their arm against private property. He figured that there could be no stable social order without inexorably functioning social control and punishment.

In the system of social links, Isidore ascribed an important place to the family, offering a detailed description of the many grades of kinship. But here, too, he was a captive of Roman law (e. g., he did not shrink from describing the terms and conditions for divorce, though at that time the Catholic church considered divorce impermissible).

It may seem strange at first glance that a book which pretended to be the model of culture, should eventually turn to the subject of war and to military affairs. In all previous scholia and commentaries, these subjects were treated exclusively as "applied". Yet Isidore devoted a whole book to them and, what is more, placed war and games under the same head.

In the world where Isidore lived, war was bitterly commonplace. That is a historically indisputable fact. As is the fact that Isidore dealt not only with "pious" ecclesiastics, with "obedient" disciples and diligent scribes, but also with warlike kings and the Gothic nobility, which saw war as the purpose of life. True, the problem of war was intensively discussed by the Christian theologians of

the 4th to 6th centuries, with this resulting in the formula: "A military age — a military God".

As for Isidore, he discussed war as an art. He described its accessories — the weapons, insignia, and music. But all these descriptions were little more than a hollow decoration from which people were removed. The antithesis of war was peace, which came on the heels of victory. And peace, Isidore pointed out, gave people an opportunity to live normal lives "without fear", devoting themselves to work and enjoying its fruits.

Isidore of Seville did not favour a contemplative style of life. Earlier on, in his *Synonyms*, he wrote: "Words, however, should be preceded by acts. Practise what you preach. Set an example and thereby confirm what your words teach. Be more than a tutor, be an imitator of virtue."<sup>20</sup> Isidore was convinced that an individual was himself answerable for his life and acts. Evil, he said, could never be justified. "If you receive an order to do evil, do not carry it out," he wrote. "If you are ordered to perform an evil act, do not obey. Whoever should give the order, never agree to do evil, even though you should be punished for it, and even though this would mean pain and torture. It is less frightening to die than to carry out an unrighteous order."<sup>21</sup>

While intellectual work, Isidore held, was essentially the lot of clerics and, to some extent, of the social elite, work in general was an inescapable condition of human existence whether it was political, military, agricultural, or artisan. All occupations were deserving of respect if painstakingly and thoroughly performed in accordance with their purpose under God. Whether mental or physical, work was an essential component of Isidore's cultural system. This was something new as compared with the antique tradition, according to which physical labour was worthy of contempt and was to be performed by none but a slave. Gradually, Christianity introduced a more respectful attitude to that sort of activity, as clearly reflected in the Rule of St. Benedict and the attitude of Cassiodorus.

The last books of his *Etymologies*, Isidore devoted to va-

rious types of productive labour, to its implements, and to the pertinent installations, buildings, and the like. He wrote of agriculture, of grain crops, leguminous plants, grapes and viniculture, trees, and the flora in general. He was obviously anxious for the reader to know the tiller's work which fed him, and also various crafts and domestic utensils. He numbered farriery and seafaring, painting and sculpture, garment-making, shoemaking, and the making of adornments, among the "practical" crafts (and described them at length).

But, he pointed out, the individual should also devote some time to entertainment, to spectacles and games. The theatre, the various types of stage performances, actors, music, and dances—all this is discussed in the *Etymologies*, for it occupied a specific place in Isidore's cultural world constructed by analogy with actual life and in accordance with the rhetorical tradition. Isidore, indeed, went out of his way to embrace all the manifestations of human life, all the elements of knowledge of the divine and earthly, all the secrets of the universe and of the human soul. And he did this in the manner usual for his time, by means within his reach, with great diligence and application.

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## ATOMS AND ANGELS

The last Latin essentially philosophic treatise, Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, was completed in A.D. 524. From that moment on, and right up to the Renaissance, Western Europe was ruled by a theology that absorbed all philosophical topics and made them subservient to its own ends. Yet medieval thinkers who gravitated towards universalism and who, it would seem, had unshakeable guidelines established by the Scriptures, continued, all the same, to address themselves to the "pagan wisdom" or, to be precise, to whatever of that "wisdom" that had survived.

One of the main medieval sources on antique philosophy, especially until the 13th century, was the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville. It was widely circulated among the learned elite, but also in the schools. Although grammatical and lexical studies had been fundamental in Isidore's construction of a cultural model (a model that, we may recall, was designed to suit the ideological restructuring of a society moving from pagan Antiquity to the Christian Middle Ages), he could not entirely bypass philosophy, for he was the last of the fledglings of the late antique culture, and also a Christian pastor. Philosophy, after all, was in the guise of dialectics an indissoluble part of the seven liberal arts. Besides, for several centuries, it had been treated by Christian theologians as both a field

of bitter polemics and a buttress of theology. So, the attitude towards pagan wisdom was a sort of testing-stone as to the medieval scholar's vision of the world, imparting a specific colouring to various periods and schools in the West European culture of that time.

The "non-philosophical" nature of Isidore's writings, I think, generates particular interest in his attitude towards antique philosophy, being an indication of the extent to which it was assimilated in a society that was growing barbarian and Christian. It also showed how philosophy had been adapted to the needs of medieval school education, and how it was apprehended by the intellectual elite and the wider circle of those whose education was confined to the seven liberal arts.

Isidore, too, faithful to the Christian tradition, held a dualistic view of pagan wisdom. In the Epistle of Apostle Paul to the Colossians, we might recall, there was this warning: "Beware lest any man spoils you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (2:8). Isidore repeated that admonition.

The Christian theologians were severe critics of pagan philosophy, but adopted some of its propositions and fitted them to the new world outlook. Summing up the Christian attitude to Plato and his followers, Augustine, for example, declared that they deserved their fame and had managed to espy in God "the beginnings of being, of understanding, and of life".<sup>1</sup>

In Isidore's writings, too, we find many utterances of that sort, but always accompanied and counterweighed by censure of the pagan wisdom. Isidore referred frequently to antique authors, including the philosophers. And that spoke much more eloquently of his sympathies than any direct evaluation. He traced the link between philosophy and Christianity to remote Antiquity. In Isidore's opinion, Moses had been the first philosopher, though, to be sure, this did not prevent him from naming Greece as the place where philosophy was born, as the "mother of the liberal arts and the wet-nurse of philosophers".<sup>2</sup>

In the 6th chapter of the eighth book of *Etymologies*, entitled "*De Ecclesia et Sectis Diversis*", Isidore gave a survey of the pagan philosophers and something like a brief history of antique philosophy. The chapter entitled "*De Philosophis Gentium*" followed a discussion of heresies and schisms, and was itself followed by accounts of poets, sibyls, magicians, soothsayers, pagan gods, and so on. This was a tribute to Christian tradition, for since early Christianity listings of heresies were common practice, and usually also contained the names of pagan philosophers.

Formally, as we see, Isidore classed antique philosophy among phenomena that were denounced by the church. But Isidore referred to philosophy in a tone entirely different from the tone he used to refer to heresies or schisms. To begin with, he tried to impart system to antique philosophy, and did so not on a chronological principle but by the significance of the various schools for him, the author of *Etymologies*, and, more broadly, for the Christian teaching.

He did not set about exposing the "misconceptions" of pagan thinkers, but rather tried to spot the useful elements (as he saw them) in their doctrines. He pointed out, among other things, that the word "philosopher" dated back to Pythagoras and meant "lover of wisdom".<sup>3</sup> Philosophers, he wrote, were divided into three grades according to the subjects that engaged their attention: those who studied nature, those who cogitated on morality, and those who studied nature or cogitated on morality by rational, that is, logical, means.

Isidore dwelt at length on some of the pagan philosophical schools, stating that they were known by the names of their founders, such as Platonists, Epicureans, and Pythagoreans (in the order given by Isidore) or by the place or situation in which the philosophy concerned was exercised, such as Peripatetics, Stoics, and Academics. In addition to these schools, Isidore named the Cynics and Gymnosophists. Similar classifications might be found in the writings of Jerome, Augustine, and John Philipon. Isidore completed the chapter in question by naming Epicurus and Zeno.

Let us see how Isidore interpreted these schools. As I have already said, his description of the origins of philosophy was exceedingly vague. He pointed to its biblical source, and observed offhandedly that it might have originated in Egypt. But he also stated time and again that Greece had played a most conspicuous part in conceiving philosophy.

In the chapter on pagan philosophers, he placed the first known ancient Greek thinker, Thales of Miletus, among those who believed that "God is Reason".<sup>4</sup> This definition did not in the slightest convey the real substance of that ancient philosopher's ideas. It really referred to Thales' disciple Anaximander, whom, however, Isidore did not mention.

But let us not blame Isidore, for his depictions were of a most general nature. Besides, he had earlier, in the second book of *Etymologies*, given the following sketch: "Among the Greeks, the first to study physics was Thales, one of the seven sages. He, too, had understood earlier than others the reasons for the movement of the sky and the essence of natural things. What he saw he divided, like Plato later, into four sections, namely, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy."<sup>5</sup>

Isidore's assessment of Thales merits a closer look. Leaving aside the question of his accuracy as to the historical aspect of the case, he was clearly not interested in the substance of the ancient Greek sage's views. All he cared for was the methodological side, thus showing his own preference for teaching over theory. Isidore mentioned Thales in the chapter, *De Divisione Temporum*, and also in his treatise, *De Natura Rerum*, in connection with the subject of eclipses.

He singled out Heraclitus among the pre-Socratic philosophers, saying that he produced the world "out of fire". Let us note, too, that though Isidore often resorted to the concept of "elements" when describing the macocosm and microcosm, he referred nowhere to the Ionians, and particularly Empedocles, who had elaborated that concept.

Isidore showed an interest in the Italian pre-Socratic

philosophers, notably Pythagoras. In his *Chronica*, which follows the Augustinian model in naming the six ages of humanity, Isidore stated that in the fifth age, from the year 4680 to 4714 since the Creation, during the Judean captivity, there had lived a man named Pythagoras, "a philosopher and the creator of arithmetic, a contemporary of Pherecydes of Leros, the first historian, and of Xenophanes, the writer of tragedies". He also mentioned Pythagoras in *Etymologies* as the founder of arithmetic. In his discourse on scholiast Persius, Isidore observed that Pythagoras had also been the inventor of letters. According to Pythagoras, he wrote, the world consisted of numerals, with the Supreme Reason imbuing all things.<sup>6</sup> He regarded the followers of Pythagoras as a specific philosophical school, but did not bother to describe it. Brief references to some Pythagorean propositions occurred in sections of *Etymologies* devoted specifically to arithmetic and music.

For Isidore, Socrates was above all the deviser of ethics. The well-known Socratic phrase, "know thyself", was the guiding idea in Isidore's treatise, *Synonyms*, a piece of didactic writing on morality where he called for self-knowledge as a means for self-improvement.

The Platonist tradition also occupied a conspicuous place in the synthesis of Christian theology. In the late antique schools and right up to the time of Isidore, mathematical subjects were based on the Pythagorean and Platonist interpretations (e. g., Boethius' *De Institutione Arithmetica* and *De Institutione Musica*, and the relevant sections in Cassiodorus' *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularum Litterarum*). But Plato's own writings, whose study had always been confined to a small circle of learned men, were becoming more and more inaccessible owing, for one, to the negative attitude of the church, and also to the language barrier, which became insuperable (in a Europe that was turning barbarian, knowledge of Greek was becoming a rarity, while only the dialogue *Timaeus*, with commentaries by Christian Neoplatonist Chalcidius was available in Latin).

Since the Revelation was considered the supreme truth,

it was essential to reduce the doctrine of Plato and other antique thinkers to a simplified scheme, a sum of propositions that either confirmed or denied the faith. Christian theologians, like the late antique scholiasts (on an admittedly different ideological basis and with other aims), had considerable experience in drawing up such schemes, and Isidore took advantage of them. He compiled a brief chronicle on the model of Jerome and Eusebius in *Etymologies*, and declared, among other things, that in the reign of Darius there had lived Plato and Gorgias, the first rhetorician. Then, in a lengthier chronicle, he pointed out that Artaxerxes had reigned for 40 years. It was in his time, he added, that the story of Esther had occurred. Plato and Xenophon, those two disciples of Socrates, lived in this period. In the next section Isidore informed the reader of Plato's death.

Isidore set forth the substance of Plato's philosophy (like that of all other antique schools) in its relationship to theoretical propositions that held importance for Christianity. Plato and his followers, he wrote, believed that God was the creator of souls, while angels created the bodies, and after many years the souls migrated to other bodies.<sup>7</sup> Isidore considered Plato's metempsychosis theory foreign to the Christian faith. For him it was connected with various eastern cults, and his objections were much like Augustine's.

Isidore wrote nothing about the Neoplatonists, confining himself to a brief reference (in his school course on dialectics) to Porphyry's *Isagoge* on Aristotle's interpretation of logic. This was an essential component of the school course and concerned the instrumentarium of logic, sidestepping anything that had to do with metaphysics. It is most unlikely that he had heard nothing of the pagan Neoplatonism. Evidently, however, the recent contention between Christianity and Neoplatonism, some of whose basic philosophical tenets were much alike, and hence doubly irreconcilable was no longer topical for Isidore. He evidently figured that the polemic between them had been conclusively settled in the works of the church fathers, notably Augustine.

It was important for Isidore that Plato conceived God as being "outside time and incorporeal", and that Platonists considered God the "ruler and highest judge". He called attention to the Platonists' mistakes having led to heresies, notably, Arianism. Valentinian, Plato's Christian follower, Isidore wrote, denied Christ's corporeal nature, and thereby also his human nature.

Isidore separated the Academics from the Platonists. He did not see any direct continuity between Plato's views and theirs. He reminded us that the latter took their name from that of the estate near Athens where Plato had taught. Nor did he forget to say that the teaching of the Academics was indefinite and mystic.

He made special mention of the so-called Middle Academy (3rd century B. C.) and of its head, Arcesilaus of Cyrenaica. To stress the school's inclination to destroy dogmatic philosophy and its spirit of scepticism, Isidore maintained that Arcesilaus was a follower of Democritus (this was contrary to the facts). And Democritus, that materialist philosopher, was for Isidore a bearer of negative views. In the treatise, *On Heresies*, ascribed to Isidore, the rejection of the Academics was still more conclusive: the physicists, it said, provided definitions to cognise something, while the Academics, to cognise nothing. Quite obviously, Isidore counterposed that school to the theologians and physicists who, as he saw it, sought to cognise God and the nature of the world by rational means.

The Stoics had Isidore's incontestable sympathy. Many Christian theologians, indeed, saw them as the predecessors of their own teaching. The late Roman scholiasts, like Boethius and Cassiodorus, paid homage to them. Isidore denoted the origin of the school's name: it derived from the Stoa Poecile (Painted Porch) at Athens, where "the sages engaged in philosophy". The school's founder, Isidore noted, was Zeno of Citium.

Isidore laid stress on the ethical side of the Stoics' doctrine. "They said," he wrote, "that it was impossible to attain bliss without virtue."<sup>8</sup> He assumed that since everything in the world was sinful, they had become at-

tached to the virtue of temperance, to positive beneficence, though they also maintained that the soul perished with the body. In short, Isidore enumerated a considerably curtailed but traditional set of Stoic properties: love of virtue, striving for positive beneficence, recognition that the soul was mortal, and that divine law was exclusive and the world material. The Stoic motto, "learn to live right", found an ardent response in Isidore, and ran right through his ethical and didactic writings. He was also attracted by the Stoics' cosmological ideas. Especially those of Posidonius, who elaborated the doctrine that love cemented everything in the universe, and those of Dionysius, who, as Isidore saw it, believed that "God enclosed within Himself four elements".<sup>9</sup> This is especially evident in his *De Natura Rerum*.

School tradition paid special tribute to Aristotle, and specifically his logic. The metaphysical aspects of his doctrine were, in effect, left in the shade. Isidore followed the same path. In his *Chronica* he wrote that Aristotle was the philosopher who had glorified dialectics. He also pointed out that Aristotle was the founder of rhetoric, whereas Plato had the honour of creating the sciences and arts. Isidore attributed to Aristotle everything that concerned form, logic, and philology. He also ascribed him the determining role in the development of grammar, which was Isidore's favourite science. He set forth the Aristotelian doctrine of *categoriae* and syllogisms, that is, of logic, most briefly in the chapter on dialectics in *Etymologies*.

He wrote that the followers of Aristotle, the Peripatetics, were so called because Aristotle, their teacher, was in the habit of walking as he conducted his disputes. The Peripatetics maintained, he said, that only a small part of the soul was eternal (this was possibly a hint at the theory of the active intellect), while its greater part was mortal. But he went no further in his description.

Isidore's attitude to Epicurus and Epicureanism seemed to have been quite complex. In his brief review of the history of antique philosophy, he shared, as it were, the strongly negative attitude towards that school of the Christian theologians. (Take Lactantius, who deprecated



the Epicurean doctrine. But, to be fair, we should remember that Christian writers resorted to Epicurus's arguments to deny the existence of pagan deities.)

Here is what Isidore wrote:

"The Epicureans took their name from Epicurus, a philosopher enamoured of vanity rather than wisdom, whom other philosophers called a swine (this statement is probably traceable to Horace — *V. U.*) because, having wallowed in human excreta, he considered bodily pleasure the highest of blessings. He said the world was not governed by any divine providence and that it had no ruler. He saw the origin of being in atoms, which were indivisible and singular bodies whose accidental combinations gave rise to all things. He believed that God had not set anything into motion, that everything was corporal, and that the soul was nothing but the body. Hence, he declared: when I die, I shall no longer exist."<sup>10</sup>

Whatever Isidore might have said, however, the atomic doctrine of Epicurus, which he apprehended through Lucretius Carus, the Roman philosopher, had so captured his imagination that he devoted a special chapter to it in his *Etymologies*. He also referred to it at length in his treatise, *De Natura Rerum*.

As tradition demanded, Isidore condemned the Cynics. He accused them of spurning social conventions. For this reason, he wrote, they resembled canines, from whom, possibly, they had taken their name (as it sounds in Latin).

Among the ancient philosophers, he mentioned the Gymnosophists, who indulged in philosophical debate in the "shadowy deserts of India".<sup>11</sup>

In his brief review of pagan thinkers, Isidore singled out Virgil and Cicero, who, he observed, comprehended the nature of God. He also mentioned them in his *Chronica*. And Cicero's name cropped up again in the account on rhetoric in *Etymologies*. Isidore's own ethical ideas were strongly influenced by the eclectic stoicism of Cicero, writer of the *Tusculanae Disputationes*. This was especially evident in his *Synonyms* and his *Sententiae*. Cicero's in-

direct influence was also felt in the spirit of Isidore's philosophical eclecticism.

The many quotations in Isidore's works of antique writers, philosophers, and poets, lead me to believe that invariably at the moment of writing he was carried away by the concrete idea of the fragment which he was citing, while he gave little thought to what their writings were worth in the general philosophical context. As a result, he often wrote of things that were at odds with the Christian doctrine, thus instilling pagan ideas into the minds of his contemporaries and of numerous generations of medieval scholars.

The history of antique philosophy, as suggested by Isidore, was anything but consistent. There was no singleness of criteria nor of assessments. Besides, it was quite incomplete. His accounts contained almost no information about the specific content of any of the doctrines or of their distinctive features. He no more than enumerated the names of those philosophers who had been heard of in the late Roman school, and even here committed no few omissions. No references were made to concrete works. The quotations he gave were mostly taken from scholia and other teaching aids of the late antique period. That is what struck the eye when comparing Isidore's writings with those of Boethius, who was well versed in antique philosophy and sought to reveal its great wealth.

The above was hardly due to Isidore's negligence or reluctance. There was a general decline of philosophical thinking and of the scholastic philosophical tradition by the 7th century. Cassiodorus, too, offered no more than a dry summary of Boethius, while Isidore confined himself to a simplistic scheme of Cassiodorus. Besides, in substance, philosophy was not for Isidore the "science of sciences". For him it was no more than dialectics in the specific sense of the word, that is, the art of constructing arguments and proofs. Referring to Cassiodorus, that most eminent of Roman educators, he wrote: "Dialectics and rhetoric may be likened to the human hand. One moment it is compressed into a fist, the next the palm of the hand is

open. The latter joins words, while the former helps to distinguish them.”<sup>12</sup> His classification of antique philosophy was therefore, that of a rhetorician and teacher who wanted to preserve the elementary data on the subject at hand. Foreign to any direct philosophising himself, he was eager to legalise the “opinions” of the pagan sages, and included them among the intellectual authorities of the Middle Ages.

I think it is worthwhile to look at Isidore’s attitude towards Lucretius Carus, the Roman materialist philosopher, and his traditions.

Soon after Sisebut ascended the throne of the Visigothic Kingdom (he reigned from A. D. 612 to 620), Isidore of Seville, who was his tutor and elder friend, handed him his treatise, *De Natura Rerum*. It had been written at the young king’s request, as we see from Isidore’s dedication. Sisebut’s reign was the last relatively stable period experienced by the Visigothic Kingdom. Isidore, whose feelings were not simply those of a subject for his king, but could be described as paternal, thought highly of Sisebut’s accomplishments and considered him a model ruler. This we learn from the pertinent passages in his *Historia de Regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*. He also commended the fact that Sisebut was a patron of science and the arts. And, indeed, Sisebut’s time was that of the so-called Visigothic Renaissance.

The treatise *De Natura Rerum* was written before *Etymologies*. But the subject matter in the two works is nearly the same. This was especially true of the 13th and 14th books of *Etymologies*, in which Isidore described the World and its parts, and the Earth and its parts. Subject matter of the same kind was also introduced in some of the other books of *Etymologies*. Isidore, who was a man of far-ranging knowledge for his time, had always, as I have already said, gravitated towards the grammatical and rhetorical pillars of culture. But he was also interested in matters related to what he called the philosophy of nature.

He launched out on writing his *De Natura Rerum* after many years of interpreting and commenting on biblical

texts. What prompted him to do so was King Sisebut's request. But that request was subjective as much as it was objective. The king's interest in the philosophy of nature was largely cultivated by Isidore himself, the royal tutor and adviser. It was no accident that in an address to Sisebut, Isidore referred to the example of the biblical King Solomon, the "ideal ruler". He said that study of the nature of all things should not be assigned to superstitious minds if they could be examined by men of sound and sober reason. For if such study had no relation to the quest for the truth, the wise king would never have said he wanted to know the location of heaven, the property of the elements, the changes in rotation [of the luminaries] and the division of time [into the seasons of the year], and the disposition of the stars. A thirst for knowledge, as Isidore saw it, was one of the necessary qualities of any "ideal ruler". That was why he cultivated it in Sisebut. And with success. The king wrote an interesting astronomical poem, possibly a response to the lunar eclipses of 611 and 612, and the solar eclipse of August 2, 612. A little naively and more than a little confusedly, but with the utmost diligence, the king endeavoured to pass on the ideas which he had gleaned from Isidore's treatise, *De Natura Rerum*.

It is not amiss to note that interest in cosmography, astronomy, and notably astrology, was a hallmark of the period from the 4th to the 7th centuries. This was true not only of the West, which had fallen on evil days, but also of the more stable East, which was literally inundated with writings on these subjects. Visigothic Spain, too, did not escape the vogue. An astronomical school was founded in the Abbey of Sts. Cosmas and Damian in the vicinity of Toledo. It was headed by Eugenius of Toledo and his disciple Elladius, who was made bishop of Toledo in 615 with Sisebut's approval. Sisebut extended his protection to the Abbey.

The simplest explanation of the interest in astronomy, and especially astrology, was the exceedingly complicated situation in the Mediterranean world at the junction of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Human life had lost value. Isidore deplored this and insisted that man, the

personality, should be respected in accordance with the standards of Roman law. Apocalyptic expectations and extreme psychological instability were a natural result of the ceaseless and destructive wars, the poverty, hunger, and epidemics, that tormented the West. The consciousness of the mass of the people, and that of their pastors, was clouded by Doomsday ideas. We can judge of this by the message that Pope Gregory I wrote to Ethelbert, King of Kent, in the beginning of the 7th century. The five cosmic phenomena which Gregory I enumerated also attracted Isidore's attention in his *De Natura Rerum*. Social and political instability were a breeding ground for superstitions and belief in astrology. Cosmological and astrological "search" was psychologically justified by the striving to escape the awesome realities.

In Visigothic Spain there had been an extra reason for the interest in these things. Here, the traditions of Arianism with its philosophical dependence on Aristotelianism and a striving to accept the Scriptures literally, were still alive. Unrestricted use of allegories in commentaries on the Gospel was rejected. Yet Catholicism did not become the official religion until A. D. 589. So that Isidore himself was liable to display an unconscious leaning towards Arian ideas which, it would seem, he should have unconditionally rejected in his capacity of orthodox prelate. He may have been prompted to write his treatise *De Natura Rerum* by the unconscious wish of overcoming the remnants of Arian influences in the country, countering them with a concept that conformed with the works of the ancient, especially Catholic, authors.

Isidore's treatise was not intended exclusively for the king. It was obviously meant for a broader circle of intellectuals. There was a hint of this in the address that opened the treatise, which counterposed superstition and common sense. In any case, the treatise was used to teach clerics cosmography, as witnessed by the fact that it mostly reached the scholastic centres of Western Europe.

The extent of the influence of Isidore's treatise on early medieval scholarship may be judged by the fact that as many as 17 transcribed copies dating to the 7th to 9th

centuries, and containing the treatise in full or in part, have come down to us. It was written in Seville, and was then handed to the king in Toledo. Thereupon, transcripts reached Saragossa, then Fleury and Saint-Denis and Cambrai (in the Frankish kingdom), and also Italy, notably Monte Cassino, and some German abbeys (in Fulda, and others), and the monastery in the vicinity of Salzburg. At about the same time, copies also appeared in Northumbria and Ireland. As a result, the scripts formed several branches: the Spanish, French, Italian, German, English and Irish. Nor did the scripts lie about gathering dust. They were transcribed in monastic scriptoria and diligently studied in monastic schools.

Isidore's *De Natura Rerum* was a kind of crossroads of pagan and Christian views of nature. We take it for granted that the Middle Ages had no particular interest in studying Nature. Yet this is contrasted, unaccountably at first glance, by simple listing of the many medieval treatises on the nature of things and on the world, and of encyclopaedic works, many of which dealt with Nature. Isidore's treatise, in fact, was the first of many similar works put out in the next several centuries. No, medieval authors did not turn their backs on Nature and the world. On the contrary, they appeared to have been attracted to the subject. And when we pick up any of their manuscripts, we come upon a world that appears familiar and yet totally unfamiliar, recognisable and yet totally unrecognisable.

People today, of course, have entirely different, truly scientific, ideas about the structure of the universe, about the Earth, and natural phenomena. But that is not all. Differences of that kind are easily explained. They are a natural effect of the progress of science. What looks strange to us is that even such habitual things as the alternation of night and day, the contrast between water and soil, between plants and animals, was refracted through something like a magic crystal in those manuscripts. Antique natural philosophy replaced the actual links between phenomena not known in those days by figments of the imagination, substituting conjectures for the facts. And

medieval scholars followed suit. Though the approach and content of the antique natural philosophy and the medieval notions of Nature were different, they were akin because of their common contemplative method of studying Nature, spurning details and formal distinctions, and seeking to record the fundamentals, so to speak, as conceived in accordance with the specific world outlook.

This similarity is not as distinctly felt when comparing the greatest of the philosophical systems, such, for example, as the Platonist or the Aristotelian, and their modifications until the end of Antiquity, with the major theological teachings, such as those of Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. It would be more accurate to say that all similarity was relegated to the background by the tremendous differences between philosophical and theological thinking. The search for ways of attaining knowledge about the One, the Supreme Idea, the First Cause, which was typical of Antiquity, degenerated in the Middle Ages to an apologia of the Absolute. Yet in the scholastic tradition, which multiplied the samples of "lofty" philosophical and theological thinking and brought them down, these similarities of approach were sufficiently visible, as they also were in the everyday consciousness of people.

In his *De Natura Rerum*, Isidore introduced this average, close to scholastic, approach to Nature. At the same time, his treatise was the point of departure for any "intellectual cognition" of Nature in the Middle Ages. This leads us to wonder about the relationship between the treatise, which had been so important in medieval times, and the antique knowledge of Nature.

There is some association between the title of Isidore's treatise and that of a poem by the Roman 1st-century B. C. Epicurean poet, Lucretius Carus. The poem was given its title, *De Natura Rerum*, by the grammarian Probus in the 1st century A. D. It flowed organically from the poem's text. Lucretius makes reference to the expression time and again. But a thread runs from Lucretius back to Epicurus, author of 37 books on Nature, and still farther back to Empedocles, Parmenides, and the Ionian school

with their strong interest in constructing a philosophy of Nature.

A special place in the philosophy of Nature belonged to Aristotle, who produced a detailed cycle of "natural science" treatises, including *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *On Beginning and Perishing*, and *Meteorology*, which was often commented upon, and to which Isidore's *De Natura Rerum* and the *Etymologies*, and a number of treatises on animals as well as the so-called *Parva Naturalia*, are closely related.

Aristotle's undertaking was continued by Theophrastus, his disciple and successor at the Lyceum, "father" of medieval botany and initiator of doxography, a specific genre that exercised some considerable influence on all subsequent culture. Doxographic works, collections of an encyclopaedic nature, dealt with specific subjects. They elucidated selected fragments of various doctrines, and the "opinions" of philosophers "cited on a problem" principle. Theophrastus' first doxographic collection covered the views on Nature of Greek philosophers from Thales to Plato. And *Placita* by Aëtius (1st century B. C.), which was one of the main Latin sources on natural science prior to Isidore's works, was directly tied to Theophrastus' compendium. Lucretius continued the tradition of natural treatises, combining philosophical search for the first cause of things, for the nature that determined their substance (as accurately expressed by the notions of "natura" and "rerum natura"), for a single concept of Nature, with an exposition of the available specific knowledge in the domain of natural science. Outwardly, Isidore preserved this triunity, but he simplified it to the extreme and gave it a Christian "ideological" frame.

The triple approach retained its importance for the Middle Ages, and helped legalise and elaborate upon experimental knowledge.

The expression *rerum natura*, meaning the universe, all being, occurred in other Roman studies, such, for example, as those of Cicero and Celsus. As a result, an independent branch emerged in the system of Roman thought, which Seneca called *philosophiae naturalis*.

Stoicism with its idea of the world's self-development,



its cosmologism, which served as the groundwork for its ethical teaching, sank deep root in Roman soil. And though the Roman Stoics relegated natural philosophy to the background, giving priority to ethical matters, it was certainly not consigned to oblivion.

Lucretius the Epicurean, and Lucan the Stoic, were among Isidore's favourite writers. We see this from his numerous references to their works and ideas, especially in his *De Natura Rerum*, whose title the author used deliberately, I think, to establish a link with the Roman *philosophiae naturalis* tradition. Nor was this tradition carried forward by exclusively philosophical works. One of the finest achievements in its framework was the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder. Its elements made up a necessary part of the encyclopaedic works of, say, Varro, Quintilian, and Suetonius, whose *Prata* might, possibly, have served as the model for Isidore's *Etymologies* and, at the end of the antique period, for the works of Martianus Capella. Cosmology, the nature of the universe, and the entire spectrum of related issues, also occupied an important place in the commentaries of Servius, Chalcidius and Macrobius, who were known to Isidore.

There were still other important outlets for the then available knowledge of Nature: poetry above all, and also literature in general. Virgil, Ovid and Martial were no less informative as regards the philosophy of nature than specific natural science treatises or scholia. The poem *Phainomena* by Aratus of Soli (late 4th-3rd centuries B. C.), which had been highly popular in Rome, was also likely to have figured among Isidore's sources. Various of its translations into Latin existed, including those by Varro, Cicero, Germanicus and Avienus (4th century A. D.). It was the latter that probably reached Isidore.

Special astronomical, geographic and other "natural science" treatises, as well as various scholia, compendia and breviaries, all of them teaching aids, were another extensive source of knowledge about nature. They contained general summaries (more or less full) of school knowledge. In the latter Roman period, the number of scholia and breviaries kept multiplying, with propaedeu-

tic studies taking the upper hand over meditation. Schematism, simplism, and a striving for brevity—all, as a rule, detrimental to the content—became pervasive features of all school aids of that period, applying also to the works of even the most eminent educators. This was true, too, of Isidore of Seville. A comparison of the structure of Isidore's *De Natura Rerum* with that of the reputable works of the ancients of an analogous nature, will show that in subject matter Isidore had 26 total coincidences with Lucretius Carus' poem, 24 with Aëtius' *Placita*, and 31 with the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder. (All these works coincide, for that matter, because all of them most probably drew upon Aristotle's *Meteorology*.) The coincidences confirmed that Isidore was a follower of the Roman natural philosophy tradition. Direct analogues begin with the 9th chapter of Isidore's treatise, entitled *De Mundo*. The first eight chapters concerned the division of time (into days, nights, weeks, months, years, the four seasons, the solstice and the equinox) and were also traceable to the late Roman school tradition.

Isidore could hardly have borrowed anything directly from Aristotle. He did not know Greek, though, of course, he could have asked someone—one of the scribes, for example—to translate the fragments that engaged his mind. But Isidore was not really interested in the works of philosophers, Aristotle and Plato among others. For one thing, he always quoted them second-hand, through their commentators and scholia. But absence of direct quotations did not stand for absence of continuity. Though Isidore did not borrow their method of philosophising, he did, to a certain extent, borrow their world outlook, and some of the ideas that became part of the intellectual culture, namely, its most popular social institution, the schools, through which all educated people had had to pass. And such continuity, it seems to me, was no less important at times than a profound study of the great philosophers.

But, as he himself stressed, Isidore drew on the legacy not only of the ancients, but also of Catholic scholars. He followed their example and borrowed quite a few ele-

ments from pagan teachings, using this to prove the omniscience of God. This reorientation of antique knowledge, its adaptation to serving Christian orthodoxy, was also widespread among Christian apologists and fathers of the church. Even Isidore's "sympathy" for Lucretius the Epicurean had precedents in the older Christian literature.

It is common knowledge that, on the whole, Christian theologians were negatively inclined against the teaching of Epicurus, which was materialistic in tenor. But the polemics with Epicurus and Lucretius "in contraposition" often led to polemics "in imitation". Arnobius, a Christian apologist, for example, borrowed not only Lucretius' philosophical vocabulary, but also his ideas. In his *Panegyricus Christi*, Arnobius quite obviously imitated Lucretius' eulogy on Epicurus. In his interpretation, Christ was less of an almighty creator and more a learned creator of world "models". Among the benefactors of humanity, Arnobius counted not only Christ, but also Ceres and Liber, who were Roman deities that taught people to grow crops and cultivate the vine, and the hero Hercules, who saved mankind from all sorts of monsters.

Another Christian apologist, Lactantius, also borrowed arguments from Epicurus (through Lucretius) for his attacks on the pagans and his criticism of polytheism. He quoted the Roman poet more than twenty times. And that he addressed Lucretius in his zeal, creating a sort of symbiosis of Christianity and the rhetorical culture, did not at all look like a paradox. What surprised me, however, was that the materialistic-minded Lucretius was for him not only an adversary, but also as much of an authority as Cicero and Virgil.

The works of Arnobius, Lactantius, and Isidore were sources that deliberately or otherwise propagated the views of Epicurus and Lucretius in medieval schools and universities. The materialist search of Bernard of Chartres, Guillaume of Conches, and Gilbert de la Porrée was evidently conducted under the influence of Lucretius. More questionable, though not impossible, was Lucretius' influence on those whom Dante assigned to the tenth cir-

cle of the Inferno — such followers of Epicurus as Sicilian emperor Frederick II, head of the Florentine Ghibellines Farinata degli Uberti, the Cavalcanti father and son, with whom Dante had friendly ties, and Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, who did not believe the soul was immortal and other materialistic-minded interpreters of Aristotle.

Yet we do see a link in Isidore's writings with the orthodox Christian view of cosmography and Nature based on the Scriptures and grammatical culture. Their typical feature was that mystical meditation and allegory were substituted for any search of the First Cause. Biblical symbolism superseded philosophical explications, and natural phenomena were used as a means for decoding religious allegories.

This should be traced to the Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament dealing with the Creation. The world was God's Creation, and the Creator could be known through his Creation. Cognition of the world and the things that comprised it was thus sanctified by the authority of the Bible. While the taste for allegorical interpretation flowed from the very nature of the biblical teaching, open to God and prophetic.

Mind you, this approach had opponents, too, among the Christian authors. The sceptical Jerome, who nevertheless had become a "father of the church", rejected any allegorical interpretation of the Bible. Still, a passion for mysticism, often built upon undemarcated pagan and Christian notions, and for all possible wonders and marvels, and hence a sense of sacrament, a suspicion that there was a secret meaning in the phenomena of Nature and the events in the surrounding world, was a most conspicuous feature not so much of the world outlook as of an apprehension of the world in late Antiquity which was inherited by the early Middle Ages.

A taste for allegory was also evident in the finest intellectual achievement of the age — the works of the Neoplatonists. It was reflected, too, in literature for a wider readership, such, for example, as the treatise of Martianus Capella. The same tendency was observed in the works of

Gregory I, who followed in the footsteps of Augustine and Ambrose of Mediolan, but was less subtle and in places most naïve. Isidore's penchant for allegory had the same sources.

Commentaries on the Genesis became the favourite Christian literature. In fact, for Western as well as Eastern readers of the Middle Ages they became the main source of the recorded knowledge of Nature. This, in a way, served to confirm their authenticity, although, in fact, these commentaries were often collections of the most fantastic information about the world, about animals and plants, along with an allegorical exposition of good and evil. Still, in the Middle Ages they were most popular, as were the many physiologies in the East and bestiaries in the West.

Isidore was little less than straightforward in his allegories. He blended the celestial and biblical symbolism, picking out the allegorical interpretations that had taken firm root in Christian literature. At the same time, he held that allegories were important as a method of learning. In fact, he wrote a treatise devoted to the allegorical interpretation of fragments of the Old and New Testament. He tried to crown all the more important fragments in *De Natura Rerum* with an allegory. In the very first chapter, for example, he spotted an allegory of human life in the alternation of nights and days. Light symbolised virtue, darkness symbolised vice. Then he said that day prophetically meant knowledge of the divine law, while night stood for the darkness of not knowing. For him day also stood for prosperity and happiness of the world while night was its destruction. He stated that the world was a symbol of man, and the heavens were a symbol of the church. His set of allegorical interpretations was adopted in medieval literature.

Information that Isidore took from antique natural science treatises and scholia, alternated without rhyme or reason with quotations from the Bible, from Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory I. Isidore was sometimes careless when quoting the Bible, to say nothing of Christian authors. Out of his 37 references to the Bible, 25 were to its

Vulgate version, and the rest presumably to some other translation used in Spain before the Vulgate. Here and there, Isidore seemed to fit the requisite extract from the Bible to his own text. This relative freedom of quoting seems to have been considered acceptable in those days—in any case for a bishop in Visigothic Spain, which so zealously guarded the purity of the Christian teaching.

It is hardly possible that Isidore should not have known the Bible thoroughly enough. Obviously, he considered departures from the letter not at all sinful if the spirit was intact. More, his enormous authority “sanctified” loose use of the Bible that had, in later years, led at times to radical conclusions undesirable for the church. And that Isidore ranked among the “infallible” church leaders is confirmed by the fact that the Decretals fabricated in the 9th century to further the theocratic pretensions of the papacy, were attributed precisely to him and were named Isidorian.

In his *De Natura Rerum*, Isidore did not look upon the picture of the world as a philosopher, though he did continually address himself to philosophic postulates. Nor did he resort to artistic means. He constructed it like a hard-working craftsman out of ready-made blocks of information drawn from antique and Christian writers and school textbooks. The didactic tenor was stressed by the diagrams that illustrated the main propositions, passing down from one manuscript to the next: e.g., the round (wheel) of months; the change of seasons; the rotation of the world spheres; the elements; the circle of the world (macrocosm and microcosm); the circle of planets, and the wind rose.

They might all be found in prior teaching aids. But Isidore brought them together, and put them in the right order. It was no accident that the Middle Ages inherited the idea of the circular arrangement of the universe largely through Isidore, who simplified it, arranged it as a scheme, and made it more graphic. The idea sank deep root in literature, philosophy, and the arts of the Middle Ages. It proved especially fruitful for medieval art. Isidore's wind rose was the prototype of the rose of Gothic cathedrals. Isidore's six circles were organically comple-

mented in the medieval consciousness by yet another ethical idea: the wheel of Fortune, which also had antique roots.

Isidore's treatise was the first of a large number of medieval works that endeavoured to blend pagan knowledge of nature with the authority of the Genesis, with biblical wisdom. A hundred years later, the Venerable Bede, the Anglo-Saxon educator, would follow Isidore and write his own treatise under the same title, *De Natura Rerum*. For many centuries, Isidore's treatise would be one of the main sources of natural knowledge. And its role would be anything but unambiguous. It created a fairly simplistic picture of the world that fitted neatly into the framework of the Christian world outlook, on the one hand, while maintaining the "natural science" ideas of the ancients, on the other, prompting readers to look into the true causes of things, into explanations of the principles of nature.

Isidore's contemporaries extolled his contribution to the development of culture. Braulion, Ildefonso of Toledo, Martin Braga, and others, referred to him with admiration. Valery of Bierzo, too, wrote that he, Isidore, had revived the basics of Roman wisdom, and astonished readers with the brilliance of his language, his extraordinary diligence, and his consummate philosophy. The Carolingian Renaissance resounded with praise of Isidore. Vincent of Beauvais and Fredegar Scholasticus praised him to the skies, while Dante included him among the supreme spiritual authorities and put him in Paradise:

*See farther onward flame the burning breath  
Of Isidore, of Bede, and of Richard  
Who was in contemplation more than man.*

The works of Isidore were studied in the schools and universities of medieval Europe. Petrarch noted that they were widespread, and the humanists called Isidore "the last of the antique philologists".

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## LOVE OF WISDOM OR SAINTLY SIMPLICITY?

Three events occurred in A.D. 529 that had a determinative effect on medieval civilisation. First, the philosophical School of Athens, the last buttress of paganism, was closed down on the orders of the Byzantine emperor; second, the first part of Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis* was published that year, and third, Benedict of Nursia laid the cornerstone for the Abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy. These events may not have been simultaneous. In any case, the official closing of the School of Athens has not been conclusively corroborated. But its closing in the year when Western monasticism received the impulse that assured its existence for centuries to come, makes one feel that a new era had come, which its contemporaries perceived rather as the "finger of God" than a historical reality.

By the time the Benedictine monastery, later so famous, was built, there already existed in the West no few coenobitic institutions organised on the Eastern model. But monasticism did not grow into a conspicuous social force until after Benedict of Nursia gave the movement in the West his *Regulae Monachorum* which guided it for many many centuries. The congregation of Cluny, which launched the campaign for church reform in the 10th century, was also a Benedictine institution.

Benedict of Nursia was, so to say, a saint of a "new

type". First of all, he came from the upper strata of society. The tendency towards a certain social "elevation" of the church saw "saintly" commoners being pushed back slightly by "saints" of noble origin, who, however, lost direct ties with their milieu and forsook the advantages of their origin to serve God. Benedict was no anchorite in the usual sense of the word; he was an organiser and leader. Twelve monastic congregations came into being through his efforts in the vicinity of his native town of Subiaco. He was so dynamically active that local priests were displeased, and he was compelled to withdraw with his followers to Monte Cassino. He was also the initiator of feminine monasticism in the West, entrusting his sister Scholastica with organising a nunnery.

When laying the foundation for Monte Cassino, the monks smashed a statue of Apollo and built the oratory of St. John in its stead. This had a profound symbolic meaning. Benedict was one of those ecclesiastics who rejected pagan culture and, what is more, education in general. He had attended a traditional school in Rome, and left it not out of any reluctance or inability to learn, but because of his conviction that a true Christian needed no science; his school was in serving his God.

The Rule of St. Benedict, written, it is safe to assume, in a language close to that of the people (the original text is not extant) imposed strict paramilitary rules, since monks were "warriors" of the Lord (*milites Christi*). The same idea was expounded in Augustine's writings, and its influence on the ideology of medieval knighthood is quite obvious.

Though Benedict did not insist on extreme asceticism and preferred relative moderation, saying nothing should be done too abruptly and too strenuously, the monks were in fact fenced off from the outside world more securely than was the case with the coenobitic institutions run by the Rule of St. Basil.

Prayer and manual work were the chief duties of the Benedictine monks. Originally, the time set aside for work was twice that for prayer. This was probably due to Benedict's wish that the monastery should be fully self-

sufficient (and should supply the neighbourhood, if possible). As Benedict conceived it, the work was originally mostly agricultural. This attention to manual labour, its elevation to a virtue, shows that big changes had occurred in the consciousness of people at that time. For antique society treated manual labour with contempt as the lot of slaves and barbarians.

Now a new attitude had ripened, with its roots in the social nature of early Christianity as a religion of the empire's labouring population. By the Rule poverty was to accompany manual work. This idea of apostolic poverty as the state of the chosen was strong indeed in the theology of the 6th and 7th centuries, due above all to the disastrous condition of the European society of that time. Continuous wars, crop failures, and epidemics in the former West Roman provinces pushed a considerable portion of people to the brink of extinction. The horrific poverty of the mass of the people was a sign of the times, and the "theology of poverty" was nothing more than an attempt to vindicate it.

Gradually, the work concept in Benedictine monasteries was extended. Originally, the Rule had only just touched the subject of enlightenment. The founder of Monte Cassino had held that reading or hearing religious books and singing psalms was quite enough for the monks. But gradually the notion of labour came to include transcription of books, gathering and maintaining manuscripts, and, lastly, organising schools. This occurred seemingly under the influence of the Cassiodorus' *Vivarium*. Soon, Monte Cassino, too, became a large cultural centre. True, in A.D. 581, the Abbey was razed to the ground, but was soon restored. So was its cultural significance for Italy and Europe.

Access to Benedictine monasteries was open to all. For peasants it was a chance to enhance their social status and to obtain an education. The monasteries trained clerics and taught people for jobs in church and lay administration. Learned monks spent their lives here interpreting holy books, and studying the works of Christian and pagan authors.

Gregory the Great described Benedict's life in his *Dialogues*. At the time of the Carolingian Renaissance, the Rule of St. Benedict, whose language was found to be too common, was rewritten several times to elevate its literary standard.

Dante put Benedict of Nursia in paradise, while Cosimo de' Medici, ruler of Renaissance Florence, said the Rule of St. Benedict was the best guideline a ruler could have.

The founding of Monte Cassino meant that a school of divine office and devotion to Christ had come to replace the antique school of knowledge and rhetoric. Learnedness did not figure among the chief Christian virtues.

A few attempts at preserving educational schools was made by missionaries and teachers from Ireland. Two accounts of Roman military campaigns in Britain are to be found in Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (Commentaries). Having routed the Britons in his second campaign, Caesar received tribute and hostages, and returned home. A hundred years later, in the forties of the 1st century A.D., Britain was overrun by the troops of Emperor Claudius I. Ireland, inhabited by Celtic tribes, remained unconquered. Roman rule in Britain, though it lasted for four centuries, was little more than superficial.

But the Latin language did resound there, and reached over into Ireland. The cultural Romanisation of Ireland, however, began after the Romans had, in effect, lost their grip on Britain. It began in the 4th and 5th centuries, when Gaulish Romans appeared on the island, fleeing from Gaul in fear of a Germanic invasion. The Franks and other Germanic tribes had initially treated local people with brutal cruelty, sacking and ravaging towns and villages.

Gaul was one of the earliest Christianised Roman provinces. The first monasteries in the West were founded there, the very first one in Central Gaul by Martin of Tours, later the most popular of French saints. The monasteries that were thereupon founded in Lérins and other cities in Southern Gaul become true cultural centres.

The refugees from Gaul brought Christianity and the

monastic culture to Ireland. Here it flowered. Christianity was embraced by the Irish tribal nobility, whose chiefs founded monasteries in their lands. That was how coenobitic institutions came into being in Clonard, Bangor, and Iona.

The Irish monasteries were largely independent of Rome. Also, they were far removed from the religious struggles raging in the Mediterranean area. Monks went about converting the peaceful population. Essentially, they engaged in manual labour and in collecting and transcribing manuscripts. To be sure, their missionary activity had little success. The contrast between the learned monks and the mass of the people, a fairly wild people (as Alcuin, the outstanding figure of the Carolingian Renaissance, wrote later), culminated in that the monks withdrew to their fortified monasteries.

Precious manuscripts of the great antique poets and writers, such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Statius and Juvenal, and the works of the ancient philosophers, accumulated in the monastic libraries. Nor was the Greek language neglected or forgotten here. With extraordinary zeal, monks studied Greek and Latin, which thus subsisted in a foreign linguistic milieu. Latin was used fancifully and ornately. The Latin of the *Hesperian Sentences*, an extant collection of school exercises compiled in the monastic tradition, had lost all connections with the real spoken and written language of the Romans. It attained a hyperbolised refinement and grandiloquence. At best, it could be thought to have some hidden, sacramental meaning. The same treatment of Latin occurred here and there in the medieval West European literature of a later period. People in Ireland engaged in compiling glosses, the equivalent of modern-day glossaries.

Each monastery had its own library and scriptorium, where scribes laboured copying books brought from the mainland. The Irish manuscripts were not only excellently written, but also excellently adorned. Some of them were reminiscent of Ireland's green pastures owing to the scribes' and illuminators' (artists who decorated manuscripts) predilection for all shades of green and for plant

designs.

A tradition of Latin book knowledge shaped in Irish monasteries. Their educational activity expanded. Schoolbooks were compiled on spelling, rhetoric, and other subjects. Ireland and Britain also contributed to the early medieval Latin poetry. The potentialities of rhythm and rhyme were used most skilfully (in Europe such skill appeared only centuries later), and riddles in verse, a latter-day favourite pastime among bookmen in Europe, were produced in plenty.

At the end of the 6th century, learned Irishmen appeared in ruined and ravaged Europe. The first of the Irish teachers who "brought education" to Europe over the next few centuries, until the end of the Carolingian Renaissance, was Columban of Bangor (543-615), who came with another 12 monks, his best disciples. For 22 years, from A.D. 590, they engaged in educational activity throughout Gaul. The abbeys of Luxeuil and of Saint Gall were founded by them, and became centres of culture. In 612, Columban found himself in Langobardic Italy. Here, under the patronage of Catholic Queen Theudelinda, he founded the Monastery of Bobbio, a major centre of medieval culture and a repository of antique literary and philosophic traditions. Manuscripts from monasteries in Southern Italy sacked by the Langobards, were collected in Bobbio. And in the 7th and 8th centuries, the fine libraries of learned Irishmen, the successors of Columban, were stored there. In the 9th and 10th centuries the Bobbio library (a catalogue dating to that time is extant) had manuscripts of Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Lucretius, Juvenal, and other antique authors, not to speak of Christian writers. In monasteries, founded by the Irish, the library, scriptorium and school were, in substance, combined, as they had originally been in Cassiodorus' Vivarium.

Columban was himself a fine poet. He had mastered the methods of Latin versification, and was highly skilled in the use of rhymes. More, he also had a genuinely poetic gift for expressing emotions.

A few more waves of Irish missionaries and teachers fol-

lowed Columban into Europe. Boniface (his original name was Winfrid), who evangelised Germany, founded a monastery at Fulda with a scriptorium and library. In fact, the Irish were the mainstay of the Carolingian Renaissance. And it is small wonder that the *Gestes Caroli Magni*, produced in the monastery of Saint Gall, opened with a tale of two learned Irishmen landing in Europe and offering the Franks their wisdom, which they had brought for sale. The chief of Charlemagne's Aix-la-Chapelle Academy, Alcuin, who hailed from York, also represented the British and Irish cultural tradition, for he had been, through his tutor Elbert, a disciple of the Venerable Bede. Alcuin, in turn, became the teacher of several generations of European scholars and bookmen.

The exodus of Irish teachers to the continent was instrumental in sustaining antique learning, and contributed to the emergence of new cultural centres in Western Europe with their specific type of educational activity. Even in the hardest times, Latin schools, libraries, and scriptoria founded by the Irish remained repositories of knowledge. And for a long time to come, the cultural progress in Western Europe was traceable to Irish and British teachers. This is borne out, among other things, by a curious and most characteristic item in an 11-century manuscript, which said that Monk Theodore of Tarsus and Abbot Hadrian had taught grammar to Aldhelm, that Aldhelm had taught Bede, that through Elbert Bede had taught Alcuin, that the latter had taught Rabanus Maurus and Smaragdus, who in turn had taught Theodulf, who was followed by Heiric, Hucbald and Remi, and that the latter had countless disciples.

Pope Gregory the Great represented an entirely different current in the culture of the early Middle Ages. "The sword reacheth unto the soul",<sup>1</sup> was how he defined the essence of his time, repeating the words of the biblical prophet. Gregory was born c. 540, at the height of the Byzantine war against the Ostrogoths in Italy. In childhood, he had seen the sack of Rome by soldiers of Gothic King Totila. They had razed to the ground everything

that had survived the cruelty and greed of Alaric. The Eternal City was more like a desert in appearance.

At thirty, Gregory lived in an Italy overrun by the Langobards, who sowed hunger and rapine, exterminating the local population. For a few years, Gregory was the praetor of Rome, and it was his administration that saved the city and its population from total ruin and death from hunger. Later, however, Gregory, who belonged to the wealthiest patrician circles of Rome, founded a few monasteries on his own funds, and distributed the rest of his estate among the poor. His generosity and piety, which, to be sure, were probably utterly sincere, brought about results which a vain and far-sighted politician may have deliberately planned to achieve. On withdrawing from the world, and doing so with such brilliance, Gregory gained tremendous prestige not only among the people but also in the church hierarchy. From 579 to 585 he was Papal Nuncio in Constantinople. Here his friendship with Bishop Leander, the elder brother of Isidore, had important consequence for Italy's relations with Visigothic Spain, and, to a certain extent, for early medieval culture as well.

Upon returning to Rome, Gregory became abbot of a monastery which he founded in his own home. Hard trials befell Rome in A. D. 590, the year of the plague. "All the people," Gregory wrote, "are pierced by the anger of Heaven, and one after another fall prey to sudden death. Nor is death preceded by illness, for, as you can see, the slowness of the disease is outstripped by death."<sup>2</sup>

After the passing of Pope Pelagius, the people and the clerics of Rome unanimously elected Gregory to succeed him on the papal throne. But the pious and obedient abbot displayed an unexpected and inexplicable reluctance. He even asked Byzantine Emperor Mauricius to intervene, which obviously transcended the stereotype relations that prevailed between Rome and Constantinople. So, when the emperor failed to respond to his plea, Gregory performed something next to a theatrical farce. Reluctant to accept the purple, he prevailed on his servant to hide him in a basket and carry him to the woods. Here



he hid away until found by the Roman Christians who wished him to rule them. Thus Gregory was made to assume the office which, according to Christian legend, was founded by Apostle Peter.

Pope Gregory's activity (590-604) had no less importance for the history of the church in the West than the legendary activity of Apostle Peter. It was in Gregory's time that Rome turned from the once great imperial city into the Rome of St. Peter, with a claim to becoming the capital of the entire Christian world. Indeed, Gregory considered himself the successor of St. Peter, endowed with all spiritual and other authority. He humbly called himself slave of the slaves of God, and deliberately paraded his apparent humility to offset the brilliance of the Byzantine patriarch. His authority was high in the Western lands, and his secular power extended to all of Central Italy.

Gregory saw the papacy as being destined to create and unify the Christian world. Missionary activities were encouraged. He sent his missionaries to the Angles (on seeing them in Rome he was astonished at their appearance, for their blue eyes and light hair, as he thought, gave them the look of angels). For Gregory the Great, conversion to Christianity of remote tribes ranked among the chief objectives of the papal throne. And in promoting it, he displayed extraordinary shrewdness and the diplomacy of a true pastor. He said the new faith should not be imposed by force. On the contrary, his missionaries were to try and build Christian churches where sanctuaries of the old gods of the local population had stood before. As he said, when the people saw that the former place of prayer had remained, they would gladly go there out of habit to worship the true God instead of demons.

Ancient rites should also be turned to use, Gregory pointed out, so that customary celebrations should dispose the new converts to more readily accepting Christianity. This would be more effective than persecution, which would only generate resistance. Mind you, these "mild" instructions came from a pope who persecuted heretics without mercy and was bent on rooting out all rem-

nants of paganism which still persisted in Italy. Naturally, his tactics were deliberate. The remnants of paganism in Italy prejudiced his papal powers, and were liable to encourage local separatism. The conversion of barbarians in Europe, on the other hand, was essential if there was to be an ideological, and possibly political, European community. Gregory envisaged a universal papal theocracy whose grandeur would equal that of the imperial crown at the peak of Rome's power.

Like no other Western father of the church (except, possibly, Augustine), Gregory appreciated the tremendous importance of a single ideology and single culture to win over the masses, and he worked for it with the utmost dedication, though the undertaking was extremely difficult, in the badly divided and ravaged Europe of the late 6th-early 7th centuries.

Gregory was made pope when Cassiodorus' Vivarium had already lost its father superior, who had so perseveringly worked for the synthesis of the antique and Christian cultural traditions. The Vivarium was still a mere island of culture in an ocean of barbarism, ignorance, and grief which inundated Europe. In Italy, Cassiodorus' followers no longer had anyone to turn to to be understood. The horrified Italians submitted before the deadly invasions and natural calamities—earthquakes, and floods, and awesome diseases. The mass of the people, and every individual, were more worried about their lives and the lives of their dear ones than they were about preserving culture. The descendants of senators and patricians, heirs of ancient families, went about begging alongside the grandchildren of slaves. People had nearly forgotten about the existence of books. Scribes had put down their quills. It occurred to no one to philosophise or, in any case, to record philosophic thoughts. The majority were emaciated in body and spirit. It seemed the evangelical prophesy of Doomsday would come about very soon. And people waited for it as they would for relief. Yet it did not come, and it was up to Pope Gregory to obtain food for the hungry, to ease the suffering of the sick, and to provide shelter for the homeless. He could not turn his back

on life, and lamented this bitterly for, as he put it, the pain that gnawed at him daily had become habitual, and was at once fresh because it increased all the time. "My poor soul," he wrote, "battered by mundane cares, recalls how once, in the monastery, it soared high above all mutable things, with the transient lying in the dust beneath it. The soul thought only of the divine and, though still confined to the flesh, destroyed its bounds, and plunged deeply into cogitation. Even of death, which all men consider an agonising punishment, it thought with affection, seeing it as the gate leading to life, as a reward for its labours. And now, owing to my pastoral duties, it must concern itself constantly with earthly affairs and, having indulged in the one-time magnificent repose, defile itself with the dust of earthly affairs." <sup>3</sup>

In the circumstances, Gregory opposed the coexistence of the two ideologies, the two cultures. He wanted the antique heritage to be swept out, for the crafty rites of the pagans could not help people on the brink of death. "Why all this poverty of secular knowledge," he exclaimed. "What use can there be from grammarians, who corrupt us rather than show us the way? How can the sophistries of the philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle help us? What can we do with the songs of the impious poets—Homer, Virgil, and Menander? What good, I ask you, are Sallust, Herodotus, Livy, and other pagan historians for the Christian family? Can the eloquence of Gracchus, Lysias, Demosthenes and Tullius rival the pure teaching of Christ? What use to us are the bizarre devices of Flaccus, Solinus, Varro, Plautus, and Cicero?" <sup>4</sup>

Gregory reprimanded Bishop Desiderius for trying to teach Latin grammar to the clergy. He considered it wrong to subordinate the words of the divine prophet to the grammar of Aelius Donatus. And in Gregory's reprimands we again hear the fierce rejection of antique culture by early Christian ideologists such as Tertullian.

Gregory was constantly concerned with obtaining palpable benefits, and simply found no use for the antique legacy at that moment. (It will also be recalled that he was

considered a most learned man by his contemporaries, which was probably true by the standards of his time, serving as evidence of the prevailing cultural level). His works spoke of a decline in linguistics, rhetoric, philosophy, even theology, as compared with the standard shown by the fathers of the church, not to speak of the classic writers of Antiquity. But this did not reveal the changes which occurred in the culture of the latter half of the 6th and early 7th centuries. It would be much too simplistic to regard them as nothing but a decline in antique learnedness. At that time, indeed, there crystallised a new type of vision, and new means appeared to express it. Gregory and his contemporaries, such, for example, as Gregory of Tours and Caesarius of Arles (the former a Frankish historian and the latter a church writer), were people who gave this world vision flesh and blood, and an adequate form.

Gregory gauged literature in terms of its usefulness. An ideologist of a practical bent, he rejected antique culture not for being antique culture but because at a time when the number of educated and simply literate people steadily declined (while the church had to win over huge illiterate polyethnic masses of people), the effectiveness of the rhetorical antique culture had dropped to practically nil. In his writings addressed to educated people, on the other hand, as in his *Moralia*, a commentary on the morals from the Book of Job, and in his extensive correspondence, he himself did not shrink from antique rhetoric and grammar, and, to some extent, antique philosophy too. In general, however, few of the people who were being converted to Christianity, especially those on the fringes of Europe, knew any Latin. The existing types of Latin literature were to them both foreign and incomprehensible. I cannot help recalling Augustine's rhetorical question: "Who needs immaculate language if the listener cannot understand its words?"<sup>5</sup> And the church, specifically Pope Gregory, would have evoked just such incomprehension if they had not engaged in a search for new ideological and cultural means of influencing their flock.

Previously, the urban population of the Romanised

provinces, and only the most "enlightened" segment of villagers had been the target of Christianisation. Now the church set out to evangelise other segments too, and a multilingual mass of barbarians. To circulate the antique heritage, even though in simplified form, would have been useless in the circumstances. So, the "packaged" wisdom reposed until better times in the seclusion of monastic libraries and scriptoria. The new converts needed practical admonitions, spiritual organisation, and, lastly, a faith in miracles. For all this helped to escape mentally from the stark realities. To the people the sight or story of a miracle was much more important than refined sermons. The masses had to be addressed in their own language (not only literally, but also in the figurative sense).

It was not necessary to combat the antique paganism, which, in effect, had by then been assimilated by the church. The top priority was to "harness" the barbarian paganism that was bereft of a written language. Barbarian paganism had not previously fought off Christianity, and was no enemy of the church but rather an object it had to subordinate. That is why the church went about it in a different way. Whereas in the former case it was essential to break with a hostile tradition, to assume ideological and political predominance over antique paganism, in the case of barbarian paganism it was a question of creating a new ideological and cultural groundwork. Christianity was to be an up-to-the-minute universal means of linking the changed European world.

And Gregory saw the task and the ways for accomplishing it. To meet the new ideological situation, the church doctrine had to be differentiated, as were its methods of influencing different groups of people. While a refined theology was needed for the clerical elite and the infinitesimal segment of educated and literate people, and also for the church to function as the highest spiritual institution, a simple and comprehensible sermon, and didactic literature were required for the mass of the people. And the didactic literature had to be vivid, lively, abounding in images habitual for the popular imagination. It should

be not only for reading, but for oral presentation, like legends or parables. For that was what the barbarians were accustomed to. Examples of saintliness, courage, and self-sacrifice were required, to give people hope. Because, as Gregory said himself, absence of hope was worse than death. (Gregory expressed this idea in his notions of heaven and hell, and stressed that the most dreadful punishment was lack of hope.)

Finally, it was necessary to quench the thirst for a miracle that was felt by everybody—from the sheer “simpleton” to the highest of the ecclesiastic elite (whose intellectual standard, too, had declined).

The mass consciousness of the epoch required a supernatural confirmation of the faith. The faith would have been dead without miracles. Hence, miracles had to occur (or be passed off as such) before the eyes of delighted witnesses, who thereupon carried the word far and wide. No longer were people satisfied with the miracles described in the Bible. No longer were the stories of the miraculous deeds of Christ and the apostles enough. People wanted new wonder-working prodigies, and were supplied them in ample numbers. Thereupon, the prodigies were sanctified as saints.

Hagiographies, the lives of saints, were becoming the favourite reading matter. Their language and presentation were as simple as could be. Designed for uneducated, even ignorant, people—those who were then described as “idiots”, which meant *ignoramus* and *simpleton*—this type of literature was a response to the peculiar religious pattern of those days.

It would be a mistake to think, however, that miracles were invented exclusively by Christian writers. After all, miracles were an attribute of all other religions, not only the Christian. And many a miracle in the lives of saints was borrowed from antique literature, and partly from barbarian mythology.

Gregory, too, borrowed the tale of a man's journey to the nether world, where that man was pleased to learn that its ruler had wanted the soul of his namesake-cousin instead of his own. The overjoyed traveller returned to

earth and told his astonished friends of what had befallen him. The tale had been related with much irony by Lucian of Samosata, the 2nd-century pagan writer. Gregory's account, however, was bereft of humour. It was designed to convince readers that it was true, and arouse their religious feelings. A humorous piece was thus turned into a piece of Christian didactics.

Gregory's *Dialogues* (on the lives of the Italian church fathers and the immortality of the soul), which contained the lives and miracles of St. Benedict of Nursia and other ecclesiastics, notably Paulinus of Nola, the most brilliant of pagan poet Ausonius' disciples who renounced poetry and became a monk, were simple, even primitive in places. The characters were, as a rule, ordinary uneducated people (save the two mentioned above). The author went out of his way to stress that their "enlightened" lack of education (spiritual in the highest sense, he said) was the true pious wisdom according the wishes of God, in contrast to the vain secular knowledge. *Dialogues* were designed to show that leading a virtuous life was incomparably more important than getting an education.

That was the message of *Dialogues*. Gregory's purpose was to propagate among a primitive barbarian audience the ethical principles of Christianity not by purely didactic means but by specific psychological models and images comprehensible to the masses. In many ways, these models were taken from the popular consciousness of that period. The problem of salvation was dealt with by methods other than "philosophical" theology. It was, in effect, tackled by artistic educational means that proved effective in view of the largely sensory consciousness of the masses.

In a way, *Dialogues* excited the patriotic feelings of Roman Italians. The local saints, of which Gregory spoke, pitted their piety and bravery against the barbarians—Huns, Vandals, Goths, and Langobards—who overran Italy. More, they were shown to be able to work wonders as well, if not better, than their Eastern counterparts. For Gregory they were not only heroes, but also plain people

in whom "the youth of the soul did not fade from coming into contact with human affairs".<sup>6</sup>

The wondrous events described by Gregory occurred against the life setting of a badly ravaged Italy. This redoubled their psychological impact. Besides, the realness of the background only underscored their significance. The local wonder-workers made chopped off heads grow back, they revived the dead, stopped floods, made water flow from rock, compelled thunder and lightning to do their will, pressed wild beasts into serving them, and filled empty vessels with wine and olive oil, and thus emulated the devil himself.

In short, the reader was treated to an uninhibited torrent of fantastic tales, garnished with a few truthful details and peopled by real heroes. And all in a distinctly barbarian style.

Most of the miracles described in *Dialogues* were redemptive. They were less important in themselves than the powers which the wonder-workers had over natural or sacramental forces (as was the case in paganism). The miracle served as a supernatural expression of divine Providence aimed at the salvation of humanity or as a sign that showed people the way to God, that is, to salvation. Gregory was the first to expound on the purgatory—a subject which had been barely touched upon in earlier Christianity, and by Virgil. In *Dialogues* it appeared as a natural projection of the miracle of redemption, since redemption of the sinful and suffering was Christianity's "supreme miracle".

Gregory expounded the existence of a purgatorial fire that would burn to ashes the "venial sins" of humankind. The idea, which was subsequently embroidered upon by Gregory's successors, became a Catholic dogma, but was rejected by the Greek Orthodox church. Gregory's notion of hell was material. Hell's fire, he said, was the fire of volcanoes. He even had an explanation why one of the Italian volcanoes was known as Theodoric's Hell: one of the characters in *Dialogues* saw an apparition at the hour of death of Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king who had executed Boethius and Symmachus. Pope John I, whose mys-



terious death was blamed on Theodoric, and Symmachus threw the cruel king's soul down the vent of that volcano in punishment for his infamies.

*Dialogues* show that Gregory had skilfully picked up the thoughts of the turbulent mob, and gave unconversant people ideas they accepted, prompting them to adopt the desired opinion.<sup>7</sup> He worked for his aim consistently and shrewdly. He was not at all as simple as his characters. He piled one pious example upon another, and showered miracles upon his readers, bent on influencing "the weaker minds not convinced by proofs".<sup>8</sup>

Tales of journeys to the underworld, and so-called apparitions revealing the posthumous fate of the soul and the rewards men reaped for their carnal existence, exercised a powerful influence on the mass of the people. Gregory introduced apparitions in his works in large numbers. Nor was he the first to do so. He followed an earlier Christian tradition, the literary tradition of the pagans, and catered to the workings of the popular mentality.

What distinguished his writings was their simplicity. They could be classed as down-to-earth rather than hagiographic. He described paradise and hell as two places on opposite banks of a river connected by a bridge. One bank was bright and beautiful, inhabited by people wearing white clothes, and adorned by a magnificent edifice built of golden bricks. That was paradise. The other bank was hell, engulfed in flames. Under the bridge flowed a muddy, sombre and fetid stream that swallowed up those whom their mortal sins prevented from crossing the bridge to paradise.

Numerous imitators of Gregory appeared in the Middle Ages. The "apparitions" genre grew in popularity. Dante, too, used them in the most brilliant of all medieval "apparitions"—the *Divine Comedy*.

In substance, *Dialogues* was a sort of literary polyphony. Certainly, the voices did not sing in unison. Different levels of the narrative intertwined, various opinions were resounded. But in the final count everything merged into a powerful chorus that revealed the author's basic

idea, directing the reader to the single goal set by this pastor.

*Dialogues* was not the artless piece of writing that it might seem to be at first glance. Gregory was as persistent in his cause as the ancient Cato was, who ended all his speeches in Senate with the words, "Carthage must be destroyed". But he was more subtle and inventive in promoting the idea that the whole world must become Christian, for Christianity was the only religion that could unite the chaotic agglomeration of peoples and tongues.

He promoted Christianity in his own way, different from that of his predecessors. His methods, too, were ideological, but more effective in the prevailing situation. This spoke of Gregory's political insight. He fell back on the requisite means of psychological influence to further the drive for a theocracy, for the optimum forms of the church and its ideology in a changed world.

Gregory pursued this purpose also in his other writings, sermons, homilies, and interpretations of the Bible. He pursued it, too, through the changes he introduced in the liturgy.

Christian sermons took final shape in the West in the 4th-5th centuries. Ambrose of Mediolan provided brilliant preaching models. He spurned ornate language and the intricacies of the late Roman rhetoric. He avoided all theological entanglements. He wrote and delivered his sermons in a simple language, directing them to the hearts rather than the minds of his flock. He expounded the rules of morality, and gave advice. His sermons were essentially oral. But as concerned Gregory, he was not an eloquent speaker. His voice was weak. He preferred writing his sermons for someone else to deliver, and so as to provide his colleagues with the right models. The last of his homilies on Ezekiel, shot through with the imminence of Doomsday, was delivered during the Langobard siege of Rome, when the invaders were wont to drive people of the Eternal City into captivity with wooden collars round their necks. Thus was borne out the apocalyptic thrust of Gregory's sermons.

We might recall the high repute of Gregory's interpre-

tation of the Book of Job, which came to be known as *Moralia*. Not only did he demonstrate the allegorical sense of the story of Job, but he also extracted its moral and abstract ideas, often seemingly too abstruse. And he backed his interpretations by references to the Scriptures.

Gregory's allegories were not particularly original or profound. But that was precisely why they were comprehensible to most people. He considered Job the prototype of Jesus Christ, Job's wife the incarnation of lust, eager to overcome man, Job's friends heretics who had betrayed the church, and Job's seven sons the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. There was hardly any intimation in Gregory's writings of the poetic pagan mythology. He drew almost exclusively on Christian biblical material.

Gregory attached importance to tightening organisation and discipline among the clergy. So he issued his *Regulae Pastoralis*. He regulated the services and ritual, and reformed and standardised the chant, parts of which have survived to this day. The extensive use of music showed that he was aware of its enormous psychological and emotional impact. The Gregorian chant reflected the singing of various nations, and the pagan rhythms. It was performed in unison by male choirs and consisted basically of sounds of equal length in the eight church modes.

Gregory exerted a strong influence on the Western church and the medieval culture, and also, indeed, on that of Eastern Europe. In the West, his *Dialogues* was the basis for a large number of hagiographic treatises and collections, and notably for the celebrated *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine.

*Dialogues* was translated into Greek in the 8th century, though, by and large, the Eastern church did not approve of Gregory for buttressing the papal throne and ending the influence in Rome of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Translations into Slavic languages appeared in the 10th and 11th centuries, and a translation into French in the 12th. Gregory's *Homilies on the Gospels* reached Russia in the 12th century, and scripts in Russian are extant in Leningrad repositories.

More, Gregory the Great was made the leading charac-

ter in a number of medieval hagiographies and even in some poetic works. Among his "biographers" were eminent personalities, such as Gregory of Tours, the Venerable Bede, Paul the Deacon, and Hartmann von Aue, a 12th-century German minnesinger.

The trends that we observe in the works of Gregory were typical of the culture of his time. The barbarising of the language, which reflected the change in people's world outlook as a whole, and the orientation in culture and education exclusively on Christian models, was reflected in the works of Caesarius of Arles, whose sermons called on people to cultivate their souls as patiently and honestly as peasants cultivated their fields. The simile was typical. The preacher knew his audience, and wanted his message to reach it.

The historian Gregory of Tours, who was wont to lament his ignorance and poor knowledge of Latin, still urged his successors to preserve what he had written intact, changing nothing and correcting nothing. For he was aware of the importance of what he had accomplished. Did he not say, "Few understand the philosophising rhetorician, many understand simple speech".<sup>9</sup> The crudeness of his language, therefore, was deliberate. It made him more comprehensible to those who would read or hear his words.

All this was evidence of the birth of a new literature and, what was more, a new culture, with a different type of world outlook and perception, and a system of aesthetic and ethical values different from those of the antique world. The activity of its initiators blended with the heritage of the Last of the Romans, producing a priorly unknown cultural and historical phenomenon.

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## **HOMER'S GOLDEN CHAIN AND THE BIRTH OF THE MEDIEVAL CULTURE**

Macrobius, who was one of the Last of the Romans, said Homer's Golden Chain connected the Earth and Heaven. The antique heritage linked the times and the peoples in much the same way. It was part of the Golden Chain of European culture, and no subsequent age could do without it. Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Antiquity and the Renaissance, Antiquity and Baroque, Antiquity and Classicism, Antiquity and the national cultures, and Antiquity and present times — these are not only subjects for special research, but also substantive aspects of Europe's spiritual life, its flesh and blood, its history.

For a long time, due to the intellectuals of the Renaissance, the Middle Ages were considered a break in this Golden Chain, an inexplicable blackout in the history of culture identifiable, as they saw it, chiefly with ignorance and abscurantism. Their approach, however, was neither historical nor objective, because it rejected the very attempt to understand what place the Middle Ages occupied in the general social and historical course of events. Its metaphysical nature is obvious even if we only enumerate the successes registered in the Middle Ages: Europe's cultural elevation, the emergence there of great and viable nations, and the scientific and technical achievements of the 14th and 15th centuries.

For a long time, the Middle Ages were known as the

Dark Ages. But I think this was not due to their specific historical and cultural content, but to our meagre and frequently tendentious knowledge. The efforts of many generations of historians have altered the image of the Middle Ages. They managed to demonstrate the significance and depth, the beauty and contrasts of the medieval Gothic culture, in which the tragic asceticism and religious fanaticism were offset by the joyously emotional and artistic nature of the people's festivities, the clarity of its philosophical constructions, its tense spiritual search, and the brightness of its arts. It is now next to an axiom that medieval culture was integral, valuable, and historically significant.

This applies less to the early Middle Ages, when Western Europe was going through a revolutionary transition to feudalism from slavery and the primitive commune, passing from Antiquity and barbarism to the Middle Ages.

It is much more difficult to study the culture of transitional periods than those of its various phases once they have attained their classic substantive and formal shape. Because a transitional period is all process, all emergence, all intertwinement of old and new when it is still hard to say what will win dominance in the cultural domain.

The link-up between the specificity of the social system that has not yet entirely crystallised with the cultural phenomena that it breeds, is extremely intricate and mediate. The mechanism of historical determination is concealed by the chaotic accumulation of diverse social phenomena, unstable forms, and spiritual vacillation.

To understand the genesis of the West European medieval culture, we must remember that it emerged in a region with a powerful universalist centre of Roman culture, a culture that had a thoroughly elaborated profound philosophy (much of it borrowed from the Greeks), its own kind of theology, and a wide spectrum of scientific and practical knowledge and political theory. It took shape not only theoretically, in systems of views, but was also impregnated in social psychological stereotypes, the way of life, the popular beliefs, etc. It is quite hard to be-

lieve that such a highly developed culture, stretching over many centuries, could vanish overnight, while the social relations and institutions that had given it birth continued to exist, and people brought up in its spirit were still alive.

The emergence of the medieval culture, highlighted at its peak by dominance of the church and an ideology expressing the interests of various strata of feudal society, was exceedingly intricate and stretched out over several centuries. In the cultural domain, where continuity is especially important, this was the central factor in society's spiritual life as the dying Antique world passed into the burgeoning medievalism. At the same time, continuity had not always risen to the surface, because the Christian culture that crystallised in the West was quickly turning into a negation of Antiquity.

The medieval culture was making its first steps when the seemingly monolithic Roman world was falling to pieces. Waves of barbarians were sweeping across Europe. Barbarian kingdoms sprang up one day, and collapsed the next. Western Europe's political map resembled a swiftly changing mosaic. Yet we would miss the point if we failed to notice that barbarians who had had earlier contacts with the Roman civilisation (e.g., the Ostrogoths), and those who were farther removed from it, could not but experience the influence of Roman traditions (economic, political, and cultural) when they settled in former Roman provinces. Although Rome had fallen, its idea of universalist statehood retained its hold on the public mind. Charlemagne's empire, the Holy Roman Empire headed by Germanic emperors, the Slav Third Rome plan, and, finally, the endless theocratic pretensions of the papacy, were inspired by this idea of Roman statehood and represented its functioning in modified form in different historical conditions.

The idea itself, which sprang from the Roman way of life, as a product of the Roman mentality, became part of the medieval ideology and culture. Feudalism sprouted from a crumbling slave-owning world and a collapsing barbarian democracy. But for the barbarians, Rome was



still the ideal of dependably cemented statehood. Even Pope Gregory the Great, known as an opponent of the antique culture who extolled the "unenlightened scholarship" of Christian preachers and flayed the "sinful" pagan enlightenment, addressed Roman tradition in his descriptions of the heavenly kingdom, calling its inmates "citizens of a spiritual republic" and likening angels to the Roman consuls.

The Langobards, whose invasion shook up Italy and who tore down central government and wreaked havoc with the economy also fell under the spell of Roman tradition after a while. They learned and adopted the language of the conquered (even the first script of Langobardic laws, like the laws of the Franks, the Burgundians, and other Germanic tribes, was in Latin), and the writings of Paul the Deacon, the Langobardic historian, abounded in references to antique authors.

There was no denying the ongoing barbarisation and decline of cultural institutions, the drop in Western Europe's intellectual activity during the early Middle Ages. But this did not mean that the medieval civilisation had no antique sources. The continuity that stretched from classic Antiquity was admittedly indirect. Many antique authors, and many achievements of antique knowledge, were consigned to oblivion in the early Middle Ages. Some of them were lost to posterity forever. But we should remember that barbarisation and decline had also been felt distinctly enough in the culture of late Antiquity, that is, in the 3rd to 5th centuries. What the Middle Ages were given to accept or reject was not the classic antique legacy, nor could it be. The Antiquity of the 3rd to 4th centuries had generated the philosophical system of the Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism had points of contact with Christianity in some cardinal issues, and subsequently passed down to the medieval period ideas that did not always coincide with orthodox Christianity.

In ethics, for example, the search of an ascetic ideal was not motivated by exclusively Christian notions. Even so irreconcilable an enemy of Christianity as Julian the Apostate, claimed the same moral imperative, even though

based on a different world outlook, for he, too, saw asceticism as the way out of the moral impasse of the late antique society.

The tendencies that had surfaced back in the 3rd and 4th centuries, continued in the arts of the early Middle Ages. Late antique culture attained a peak of refinement, on the one hand, and was exceedingly simple, on the other, adapting itself to the needs of a society being barbarised. This latter tendency was especially strong in the field of education, which became increasingly primitive and utilitarian. The classic schoolbook of the Middle Ages was that of Martianus Capella, the African Neoplatonist, who produced it to meet the needs of the school of late Antiquity. This, as we see, had not prevented him from becoming a source of wisdom for many successive generations of medieval scholars. More, the entire medieval educational system was largely based on the same pillars as the late antique schools, duly adapted to fit the Christian intellectual culture. There was also a kind of assimilation of late antique traditions in literature.

And this other important fact: the foundations of the scholastic mentality, the framework of medieval spiritual life in the West, were traceable less to the church fathers, and much more to Boethius, a thinker who did not accept the basic dogmas of Christianity. He was the last outstanding 6th-century pagan philosopher, who set out to prove the profound inner linkage of the two greatest theoretical systems in Antiquity, the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. His translations of Aristotle were known in the Latin-speaking West long before Arab commentators, in the 12th century reawakened interest in them. The Platonist and Aristotelian lines of thought did not break off in the early Middle Ages; they were merely simplified and adapted to suit the prevailing world outlook and current notions. The problems that Boethius defined became traditional in the philosophy not only of the early, but also of the advanced Middle Ages.

Principles of an old culture are not necessarily drawn by the new directly from the works of its most eminent ideologues. The intellectual principles of a culture are

usually active in the social psychology, and multiply in forms more comprehensible to the ordinary mind. They are thus assimilated second-hand, as it were.

This occurred with many values of the antique culture, perceived during the Middle Ages in simplified form through the school tradition, and the traditions of everyday life.

A certain part in assimilating the antique heritage was played by Christianity. Though it rejected the pagan culture, it could not entirely isolate itself from it. Christians banned the temples of ancient deities, but they also turned them into their own churches, and the statues of sages they turned into statues of saints (as in the case of the statue of Apostle Peter in the Vatican). The church fathers did not hesitate to use elements of the antique intellectual doctrines in their works, sometimes with the purpose of winning some great pagans to their side but more often in order to criticise scathingly. In this way, the works of antique authors survived, if only in fragments, and some of their thoughts were accepted.

Those were the different ways in which the antique legacy, simplified and emended, became a necessary component of the medieval Christian intellectual synthesis.

The 4th to 7th centuries failed to produce such eminent men as Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, or Cicero. The Last of the Romans were incomparably beneath these latter both as regards the scale of their activity and its results. They did their work at a time when the antique world was fighting its last battles and giving way to the new civilisation. By and large, none of them created anything new, as we nowadays believe the thinker and poet should. But those were different times, and the tasks of culture were also different. To preserve a heritage, to pass it on to posterity, was no less important, after all, than creating new values. Nor was it easy to preserve, to prevent it from becoming a deadweight. That task was certainly humanistic, for the future always grows out of the past and the present.

The Last of the Romans tackled the task each in his own way, depending on objective conditions and personal

experience. They stopped sometimes. Sometimes they faltered under their enormous burden. But what was more important was that they accomplished their task. It was not their fault that they failed to pass down all the cultural wealth of Antiquity. By their time that wealth had been considerably pared down. They collected it bit by bit, and the result was less than modest. Nor was it always well "packaged". But again the most important thing was that it reached those for whom it was meant. The cultural and spiritual link between generations did not break. The memory of Antiquity's greatest achievements did not vanish. Nor did the very idea of culture as an indispensable condition for the existence of the human race. That, too, we owe very much to the Last of the Romans.

The world outlook in the Middle Ages was essentially theological. Christianity was more than just the ideological backbone of West European culture. It was the ideological sanction of the feudal system. It sprang up in the antique world as a negation, but also as an offspring — a mixture of Judaism and Hellenic philosophy — of the antique culture. It absorbed many elements of various religious, magic and mystic cults, and was never homogeneous as a result — not even after it had gone far in its evolution.

Medieval Christianity must not be identified with the first few centuries of Christianity, when it was only emerging as a current in head-on doctrinal clashes and seeking recognition in a changing social world. Nor was it the same as the Christianity of the time of Constantine the Great, when it was first officially recognised by the state.

The beginnings of medieval Christianity should be traced back to its crystallisation as a universal religion seeking to extend to the whole world its spiritual and, indeed, political power through the church, a specific institution of its own creation. The world was to become a single-minded community of devout believers subordinate to the church.

This conversion of Western Christianity into a world outlook and a political doctrine that claimed top place not only in the spiritual domain but also in political gov-

ernment, which sought to instil order in a society that was then being increasingly racked by chaos, occurred in the teaching of Aurelius Augustine, who assigned to God and the church the role of organiser of human history.

When Christianity became an official religion and acquired political as well as ideological status, it began to meet the needs of the burgeoning feudal world. It would be wrong, therefore, to try and find incipient proto-feudal elements in the 1st and 2nd centuries A. D. and to aver that the origins of the medieval world outlook went back to that time. No, an ideology generated in the womb of one social system simply met the needs of another. This widespread phenomenon only goes to show that the ideological and cultural development of a society is not a direct reflection of economic or social development. Still, cultural phenomena open up most fully only in a favourable historical ambience. Christianity did not spring up as a reflection of a dubious proto-feudalism, whose introduction would have immensely modernised the historical process.

And one thing more about medieval Christianity. It has two planes, as it were: one for the "intelligentsia" of those times, which was able to apprehend its theological subtleties and doctrinal controversies, and the other for the mass of the people subjected to merciless exploitation and bereft of any hope of justice in this world. In the final analysis, both planes served, each in its way, to substantiate one and the same prevailing social fact: that the social rights and powers (political and spiritual) of the elite derived from God and were an incontrovertible pillar of the world order as established by the Creator, while for the simple people their place in the order of things was one of submission and humility—leading to salvation.

The Christianity of the transitional period from Antiquity to the Middle Ages was, in effect, despite the categorical nature of its postulates, a highly receptive ideological entity that did not baulk at emendations to meet the needs of the contemporary mass thinking. Yet it would be an oversimplification to assume that Christianity reflected the needs and objectives of none but the ruling class. To

be certain of the obedience of the vast mass of people, religion and the church had to reckon with its mood and aspirations. In the absence of this, it would simply have been unable to rule their minds and hearts for so long.

As a mystical entity uniting all believers, the church went out of its way to encompass all segments of the medieval society and hence to endow them with the rights of not only cultural and ideological or spiritual, but also to some extent social and political, "citizenship". This is borne out by the fact that all social protests that occurred in those days were of an anti-church or anti-doctrinal complexion. The Christian saints, however, came mostly from the ruling strata, abandoning their social affiliations and becoming classless spokesmen of the aspirations of all social groups and classes beginning with the early Middle Ages.

Since Christianity mirrors the ideological and socio-psychological levels of the two planes of social consciousness, it has never been a homogeneous doctrine. There were very many non-Christian elements in the Christianity of the early Middle Ages. The official Christian culture coexisted with notions that sprang from the alien spiritual life of the only slightly Christianised barbarians. The general mass of people abounded in paganist ideas and a diversity of superstitions that have not been conclusively stamped out to this day. Christianity either assimilated them or pushed them far to the background. But they surfaced again from time to time, causing churchmen no end of bother and always capable of destabilising orthodoxy and its established social order.

The medieval culture emerged when the old and forceful culture of the slave-owning world was on the wane, and when Christianity's foothold grew stronger. But this was not all. Another of its important sources was the spiritual make-up of the barbarian peoples that were then dynamically emerging for the first time in the arena of European history.

In the last few centuries of the Roman Empire, antique

culture was for still a long time strong enough to absorb the barbarian element. But gradually barbarism became a ferment within it that confused the mind and created uncertainty.

At the end of the 5th and in the 6th century the situation changed abruptly. The barbarian element gained predominance all over Europe (if not in numbers, it was the leading force behind the social development of the old Roman provinces). Some hold that the barbarisation of the West European society had prompted the spread and final consolidation of Christianity. They maintain that it was the only force that could safeguard the remnants of the antique culture from final extinction.

I would not be so emphatic. In the early period of medieval history the barbarians largely maintained a consumerist attitude towards Christianity. For historical reasons, many barbarians were converted to heretical, notably Arian, forms of Christianity, but were then reconverted without much ado to the orthodox faith. As a rule, they did not understand the subtleties of doctrine, and were far more interested in the aid they could receive from the Christian God. The barbarian rulers were attracted by the new religion's idea of rigid hierarchy, subordination and discipline, which would help consolidate the people and stimulate the emergence of statehood.

The barbarians' profound incomprehension of the essence of Christianity and their purely utilitarian approach to it is reflected in the cult of saints in the early medieval period, when many had no more than a vague idea of Jesus Christ, could not grasp the Trinity, yet entertained a deep belief in some local saint's ability to work miracles. Christianity was that unifying shell which was able to cover the most diverse of views, notions, and frames of mind — from subtle theological doctrines to pagan superstitions, and barbarian rites.

This largely explains its gradual strengthening, and its absorption of other ideological and cultural developments. These in due course it compounded into a unified structure. For Christianity certainly did not intend to salvage the remnants of antique learnedness and culture

and pass them down to the barbarian world. Though the church itself, and the burgeoning barbarian world, would not have been able to survive and advance without some sort of continuity.

But not only did antique culture and Christianity influence the barbarians. There had also been a reverse process. The cultural values of the dying world and many of the Christian notions were in the process of flux, and gained new social functional forms. The barbarian world was appropriating rather than assimilating them. The Carolingian Renaissance, for example, was totally bereft of any sense of historical distance from Antiquity. Historians of that time worked whole fragments of antique authors into their works, and this with the sole object of eulogising their emperor. For people of the early Middle Ages (and the medieval period in general), the antique heroes, like the biblical characters, were clad in the garb of their own time. They conceived them as persons living by their side.

In the early Middle Ages, the deepdown and even the medium layers of the popular mind had not yet been entirely Christianised. If dialogue between the official doctrine and the people's culture lasted throughout the medieval period, in its early part, folklore and the barbarian mentality still packed extraordinary muscle. The medieval epics, which pay only perfunctory tribute to the Christian doctrine, were extraordinarily powerful. And they made up the foundation of the people's culture — the culture of a vast illiterate mass. It was passed down from generation to generation, and penetrated within the framework of the "high" medieval culture.

The medieval culture was an intricate compound of late antique, Christian, and barbarian traditions, with Christianity gradually gaining predominance and becoming the essential determinative element of the culture of the feudal epoch which refracted all the cultural phenomena of the times — those that caught up with it, interacted with it, or tried to stand their ground.





## Man Through the Ages

Her study of Boethius, thinker of the early Middle Ages, earned Victoria Ukolova a prize at the Second USSR Contest for Young Social Scientists in 1973.

She was the last of Academician Sergei Skazkin's students of the Middle Ages at Moscow University. After a few years at Akademgorodok in Novosibirsk, where she lectured at the local university, she returned to Moscow, and today she is head of the chair on the cultural history of foreign countries at the General History Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences. More than a hundred of her works on the history of medieval European culture have been published so far—monographs, articles, and translations of medieval authors into Russian.



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